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["A FARMER'S WIFE, MISS MARLOWE?" SAID SIR PHILIP; "SURELY SUCH BEAUTY DESERVES SOME HIGHER FATE?"]

KIT.

CHAPTER V.

THE glory of the garden party had waned when the fly containing Captain Montgomery arrived in the grounds of the Priory.

Lady Sinclair, as soon as she heard the news of the late arrival, came running across the lawn—a dainty picturesque figure, in her soft blue draperies.

She was full of concern and dismay over the accident; and, indeed, by this time, after a long and jolting drive over the rough road, the young man presented a very good appearance of an invalid.

She asked a dozen questions all at once, and gave a dozen orders, and fussed over Maurice in a way that would have been particularly pleasant to him had he not been feeling too tired, and in too much pain to appreciate it. In fact, it was a great relief to him when Sir Philip Desmond made his appearance on the scene.

"Get me up to a room somehow," the young man whispered.

It was characteristic of Sir Philip that everything he did was done very quietly, without any bother or fuss.

In about ten minutes, Captain Montgomery found himself in a large charming room, extended on a couch, his foot and ankle being carefully examined by his friend.

"Very neatly done," Sir Philip said, as he looked at the bandages. "I don't fancy the local doctor could have done it better."

"You were in luck, Maurice."

Captain Montgomery smiled faintly.

"I had a fairy to attend to me—a fairy with sea-coloured eyes, and hair that would delight Burns Jones!"

"A practical fairy evidently," Sir Philip said, a little drily, "since she can use her needle. But you have not told me how all this happened, Maurice."

The whole story was recounted.

"And now I suppose I shall be a cripple for the next fortnight."

"You certainly must not try to use your

foot in this condition!" was Sir Philip's decisive answer.

"But I must get back to town to-morrow, Desmond, I must."

The pathetic look on the handsome face was almost comic.

"I have a hundred things to do, and, besides, I can't burden Lady Sinclair."

"Make your mind easy about Lena; she will only be too delighted to keep you. I will send my man up to town first thing in the morning for your things, and my wardrobe is at your disposal till your own arrives."

Captain Montgomery frowned, and moved restlessly on his sofa.

"Why did I come?" he asked himself for the hundredth time. "A country garden party—perfect madness!"

Sir Philip laughed.

"You must cultivate a little patience. A week in this lovely fresh air will do you all the good in the world! Take years off your life!"

But Captain Montgomery did not view the matter in the same light. He frowned more and more as his mind conjured up all the

duties, social and otherwise, which awaited him in town.

"When this doctor comes, I shall tell him I must go up to London to-morrow somehow—it is imperative. Why, there will be the devil to pay if I don't turn up to-morrow night at the regimental dinner, Desmond."

"Well," Sir Philip said, lighting a cigarette as he sauntered to and fro in the room, "the devil will have to be paid in whatever coin he likes, for I prophesy that you will not be allowed to move from your present quarters under a week at least. What news of your mother? It is ages since I had a letter."

Captain Montgomery gave his friend such information as he desired, in a listless, pre-occupied way—his mind was running all the time on other matters.

It was certainly very hard to have such an accident in the middle of the season, and to be thrust into a dose of country life—he who really detested the country, and who had been revelling in a vortex of social gaiety, which came all the sweeter after three years' absence on foreign service. On! certainly it was very hard luck. To himself Maurice Montgomery called it by a stronger name.

It was all very well for Philip Desmond to view the matter so cheerfully. Everyone knew Desmond had developed into quite an old fogey, and it was a matter of utter indifference to him whether the season was alive or dead. Of course, with his peculiar system of living, cutting himself off from all contact with his fellow-man whenever he got the chance, the country would appeal most strongly. But Maurice Montgomery was composed of very different materials; and then he was a good ten years Sir Philip's junior, and that counted for a good deal.

And so, taking everything into consideration, perhaps it was natural he should feel not only surprised but, had tempered at the present position of affairs, more particularly when he realized that it was his own folly that had brought it about. A little later, however, he began to feel better. The doctor had certainly vetoed all question of his returning to town for the next few days; but after a little quiet conversation with Desmond, disengaged over a most dainty and appetizing little dinner, Maurice began to regard the matter more leniently; and when Lady Sinclair came fluttering in, and hovered about him with a hundred pretty little evidences of the womanly interest he had inspired, he became quite good-tempered again.

Philip Desmond unselfishly stayed upstairs all the evening; but at last, when he had seen the young man comfortably reposed in the luxurious bed, he went down to the gardens for a little air and a smoke.

"There is no getting a word from you, Philip, when your baby is near you," Lady Sinclair cried, half lightly, half earnestly, as he appeared. She was sitting on the lawn with one or two of her guests, and there were sundry couples dotted about in the distance. The night was delicious, warm, and serene, with a scent of flowers on the faintly moving breeze.

On a low chair close to Lady Sinclair sat Constance Marlowe. She wore no hat, and the moon shone down on her beautifully shaped head with its pretty brown hair waving away from the brows. She had changed her white dress to another of some grey, shabby material—her whole aspect gave one a sense of absolute peace. She harmonized well with the night. Sir Philip looked at her admiringly—the moonlight softened her face, she lost the coldness which was, in his eyes, so great a blemish on her beauty.

Lady Sinclair glanced every now and then at her friend with much admiration.

"If I were a man I should adore Constance Marlowe!" she said, in a low voice, to Sir Philip, apropos of nothing.

He smiled, as he always did, at Lady Sinclair's enthusiasm.

"Where is your husband?" he inquired. She shrugged her shoulders.

"How can you ask? Up in the tower, of course, looking through the telescope. I believe Robert fancies he will find a new star every night. He comes down looking as dazed as an owl, and shows me some piece of paper with dots and lines on it, expecting me to understand what it means. As if I could understand!"

"Well, yes," Sir Philip answered, quietly, "it is rather silly of Robert to expect so much!"

"Now, Philip, you are making fun of me—I won't have it! Go and talk to Constance, and please be very nice to her."

"Am I ever anything else?" Sir Philip asks, laughingly, as he rose to obey her.

Constance received him with the gentle sweet smile she had cultivated to such perfection.

"I hope Captain Montgomery is better?" she said. She was not in the least interested in Maurice; she had met him in the winter, when she had been in town for a few days, and, apart from the fact that he was a poor man, her vanity had been hurt by his most evident non-appreciation of her beauty. She was only interested in him now because she knew Sir Philip was very fond of the young man. It was generally understood that Desmond was something in the light of a guardian to the handsome young soldier, the truth being that Sir Philip had a very strong attachment to Maurice's mother, and acted as a trustee and executor to the property inherited from her dead husband. He had much sincere affection for the boy who had done so well in the career he had chosen, and gradually he had drifted into accepting Maurice's definition of him as the right one. To Maurice his friend was absolutely a middle-aged man whose life was lived and whose sun was set.

This, in fact, was very far from the truth, but Maurice had a way of making Sir Philip feel very old indeed; and somehow, when Maurice started an idea, everyone else was sure to follow it.

To Constance Marlowe, however, Sir Philip Desmond was neither old nor uninteresting; he was a man who pleased her in every way. She admired his country, soldierly presence; she recognized his extraordinary intellectual powers, though she was by no means equal to following them; she had a sincere appreciation for his old title and social position, and his wealth was an additional and most desirable charm. She had no fixed plans in her head concerning him, only she was conscious of a decided feeling of annoyance if she saw him absorbed in anyone else, and she had a little flutter of satisfaction whenever she saw him come toward her as he did now.

They talked over Maurice, and Sir Philip waxed enthusiastic, as he always did when he spoke of the boy's exploits out in foreign parts.

"It is not every youngster who can show such a record as Maurice Montgomery can!" he said. "I confess I did not think there was so much in him; and he is a funny mixture, for now he is home again there is very little of the soldier about him!"

"Fighting is the one strong seed that is rooted firmly in every Englishman's heart," Constance said, laughing in her soft way.

She turned her face a little from him so that he might see her delicate profile, and the shell-like ear that was so distinctly one of her beauties.

"Yes, I suppose we are a nation of bull-dogs, peaceable until we are roused, and then—" Sir Philip laughed.

"I like to feel my countrymen can hold their own," Constance said. "I always wish I had been a man. Women are so useless!"

She said this with a touch of the most sincere regret in her voice. As a matter of fact, Constance Marlowe had not the faintest desire to change places with any living soul; and, as regarded being of use in the world, well, she did not understand the meaning of the word.

Sir Philip sat down on the edge of a chair,

and crossed one leg over another. He looked very distinguished in his evening dress. He wore no jewelled studs or rings, his attire was simplicity itself.

His only ornament was a charm that had escaped from his waistcoat-pocket and dangled and glimmered in the moonlight.

Constance looked at it carefully, she had noted it before, and she wondered why he wore it, and if it were a souvenir of some tender dream now dead. Decidedly she was interested in him in more than a passing fashion.

He answered her heartily and quickly.

"Oh! I never think a woman should regret being a woman. Think of the thousand and one things she can do that are absolutely beyond us. Fighting for one's country is very fine, but woman's work is purer, better, more noble in every way. We are so helpless without you. Now take to-day, for instance, where would Maurice have been but for the tender, clever ministrations of your sister?"

He said the last word half questioningly. Constance answered swiftly.

"I have no sister," and then she frowned, but her face was turned from him. "Did Captain Montgomery go to the Limes then?" she asked.

Sir Philip told her all that had happened. "And extraordinarily well she did it too," he said, when he came to Kit's share in the matter. "Your local doctor would not disturb her bandages. Now, there is distinct evidence of a woman's usefulness." There was a little pause. "I fancy I must have seen Maurice's young Samaritan when I called this afternoon to leave Lena's message."

"I expect you did," Constance said. "It is my little cousin, a dear little soul; she lives with us. She is an orphan."

A good deal of information was conveyed in these words to Sir Philip.

"An orphan and a dependent," he thought to himself. "Poor child! not the happiest fate in the world!"

"Kit is a most wonderful creature," Constance went on, laughing softly, "she is most learned in every way. I tell her she will make a model farmer's wife one of these days, and I believe really that is her ambition; it was so like her to turn doctor. I shall have a good laugh at her when I get home!"

Sir Philip was not listening very intently to the end of the speech.

"A farmer's wife, Miss Marlowe?" he said, quoting her words. "Oh! surely such a fate, such beauty deserves some higher fate!"

Had anyone given Constance Marlowe a sudden dagger thrust the effect could not have been more horrible and painful. She could hardly breathe for a moment. A thousand feelings and emotions, such as she had never imagined had place in her heart, sprang all at once into being.

It was the first time she had actually realized the meaning of the word jealousy. She suffered acutely in this moment.

When she spoke, however, her voice was unchanged. She possessed the art of self-restraint to a high degree.

"What! you really think our little Kit—a beauty, Sir Philip?"

Sir Philip answered promptly, and for once forgetful of the fact that was so much a part of him.

"Almost the most beautiful girl I have ever seen! How could it be otherwise with such eyes. They have haunted me all day. I assure you I think I must have stared the poor child out of countenance when I saw her to-day. Her appearance positively bewildered me!"

He spoke with enthusiasm, and Constance grew loy as she heard him. What horrible thing was this that had come upon her suddenly. Her face grew cold and hard in the moonlight, but she managed to keep her voice as soft and gentle as ever.

"Why, Sir Philip, you are a poet! You have quite idealized my little Kit. It shows

how familiarity blunts one's true appreciation. Now you put facts before me I see almost with your eyes. Yes, Kit has beauty. Her hair is marvellous, extraordinary, and she has such a quantity. You must see it all down some day. I always regard her as a baby," Constance went on, laughing, "and she runs about just as she likes, as a wild thing. I suppose that is why I have never realized her true worth. Poor little Kit! I am almost tempted to wish you had not given me this idea, Sir Philip. I am so fond of her, and beauty is not always the best thing that can come to a woman!" and Constance sighed as though she could testify to the truth of this fact.

"Tell me about her," Philip Desmond said. "Has she a history? She looks as though there should be some story connected with her!"

"Only a very ordinary everyday story. Kit's history is to come, if ever she has one."

And then Constance gave her own version of her cousin's parentage and early life. She was clever at this sort of thing.

"My mother calls her her second child, and to me she is as a sister," she finished.

"You must be glad to have her with you, Miss Marlowe, are you not?" Sir Philip said, warmly.

Constance acquiesced with gentle enthusiasm, and then she gave a sigh of relief as Lady Sinclair came floating across to them.

"What serious subject are you discussing, you two?" she cried, as she rested her jewelled hand on Constance's shoulder.

The latter answered her laconically,—

"We are discussing Kit's beauty."

Lady Sinclair gave a scream.

"Kit—your cousin—beauty! Why, my dear Constance, the child is a monster! Do forgive me. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but she is really very very plain!"

Constance could have embraced the speaker.

"Beware how you give forth such heretical sentiments before Sir Philip," she laughed.

"He has converted me."

"Oh! but"—Lady Sinclair could not recover herself—"what can you be thinking of, Philip? What funny tastes you men have to be sure!"

"Well," Philip Desmond said, laughingly and yet earnestly, "my taste as far as Miss Kit is concerned is one that will be endorsed by every man who sees her. You may take that for granted, Lena."

Lady Sinclair threw out her hands.

"Well, then I give your sex up altogether. I don't understand you. I positively cannot. No, I cannot. No doubt Kit is a dear good little sort, but she is simply hideous. And I have always said so, haven't I, Constance?"

"You are a person of strong prejudices," Constance laughed, and then she rose to go.

"I really must take my departure, dear Lena," she said. "Look how late it is. Mamma will be getting anxious."

"Philip will see you home, won't you, Philip? It will be a pleasant drive."

Of course Sir Philip immediately seconded the idea, but Miss Marlowe would not hear of it.

"I am quite sure Sir Philip would have the most unkind ideas of me if I were so selfish," she cried, laughingly. "Fancy taking him all the way! No, I cannot permit it. I dare say I shall go to sleep in the cab, for I am very tired."

She was escorted with much care and courtesy to her vehicle waiting; and as Sir Philip took her hand in farewell, he begged to be allowed to call at the Limes the next day for a chat and a cup of tea.

Lady Sinclair kissed her friend affectionately.

"Do ask Mrs. Marlowe to spare you for a few days, dear," she pleaded. "It would be so sweet of you to come over and stay with me. Can't you manage it somehow, Constance?"

Miss Marlowe smiled a little sadly.

"I must not neglect mamma, Lena. You

know how much I should love to be with you, but—if I can, I will come, dear;" and with a farewell flutter of her white hand, Constance was driven away.

"She is an angel!" Lady Sinclair cried, enthusiastically, as she slipped her arm through Sir Philip's, and they went back to the chaise. "So good and so unselfish, and so beautiful!"

The "angel" sat bolt upright in the village fly, heedless for once of its many discomforts. She had had a blow, and she did not know how to support it just for the moment.

Her eyes went out through the window to the moonlit scene around, but its beauties were lost on her. She was thinking of a multitude of things. Her serenity, her sense of sovereignty and power was utterly shaken; and all this had come upon her so swiftly, so unexpectedly.

Her thoughts grew very bitter as she neared her home. The touch of her mother that was in her became accentuated. She felt a cold deep anger settling itself in her heart, and a sense of injury.

It was an evil moment for Kit, this change in her cousin's feelings towards her.

Constance Marlowe was not a woman to treat such an experience as had come to her this night lightly or easily. She had been hurt in her most vital part, and she would never forgive the cause of the blow.

Kit's history was indeed and in truth about to begin.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. MARLOWE'S voice was occupied the next morning in the congenial task to her of objecting to her niece. She was sitting in her straight backed chair examining a pile of linen which Kit had been supposed to darn.

Mrs. Marlowe's voice was more than acrimonious; she had no good word for the work, and she ended her disparaging remarks by taking out a sharp pair of scissors and cutting every mended portion that had cost Kit so much time and trouble.

"Be good enough to bring these to me to-night," she said, curtly, as she pushed the work towards the girl.

Kit's face looked troubled; she disliked openly vexing her aunt; but she was too frank and truthful not to speak her mind.

"I am very sorry, Aunt Helen; but I am quite sure I cannot do them any better. I tried my best but, I cannot darn properly!"

"It is time you learnt!" Mrs. Marlowe said, coldly. She took up her book—a religious one—and settled her spectacles on her face. "Girls in your position, Katherine, should know that there are some things they must do. Your perception, however, grows dimmer and dimmer, and gratitude I have ceased to expect. You do not know the meaning of the word!"

Kit's face flushed, and her lips quivered. "If gratitude is to be expressed in darning, Aunt Helen," she said, quietly, but with a mischievous glint in her words that she could not repress—humour and pathos were large elements in her composition—"then, indeed, I am afraid you are right to believe I am ungrateful, for—"

Mrs. Marlowe looked at the girl out of her cold eyes; for once she lost her self-control in anger.

"You are impertinent! I begin to grow weary of struggling with such a bad nature; you will bring nothing but shame and disgrace upon us. I have borne with you a long time; I have tried to be patient, and have prayed for strength to bear the burden thrust upon me; but there is a limit—I can endure no longer! Leave me, leave me at once!"

Kit paused an instant. Her face had grown white; she suddenly spoke.

"You are a cruel woman!" she said, in low tones. "You call yourself good—you are not good. You give me bread to eat, and you try to kill my heart! Ah! you think I am

made of stone, but I am not; I am flesh and blood, like you. The words you have just spoken will never be forgotten by me. I will end this matter once and for all. You shall be troubled with me no longer!"

Mrs. Marlowe stretched out her hand suddenly to her daughter. Constance had come in very quietly, and was listening with astonished ears.

She stepped forward.

"Kit! mother!" she said.

Kit turned at her voice.

"Oh! Constance! Constance!" There was a little break in her voice.

Mrs. Marlowe was in a furious rage; she lost her habitual coldness, she lost her religious restraint; she opened her heart, and launched all the bitterness and cruelty within it on the head of the girl who stood before her defenceless and alone.

Constance felt a thrill of pleasure in this suffering. It was a small return for her night of discomfort; she had passed; but her mother's anger jarred on her and annoyed her. There was something plebeian in Mrs. Marlowe, and anger brought that something out very prominently.

Kit bore with the horrible insults as long as she could, then she turned swiftly and went from the room. At the door she turned, and put out her hand.

"From to-day," she said, quietly, deliberately, "I accept nothing more from you. I leave your house, and I pray God, you may never see me again!"

Constance paused only a moment beside her mother, who had worked herself into an hysterical fit; then rang the bell, and went after Kit.

Her heart was beating fast. This was a new complication of affairs. That Kit should go away was decidedly satisfactory; but then, Constance was practical. A dozen things rushed into her mind at once, and besides, all this upset the neat arrangement of plans she had been making as she lay awake in the early hours.

She ran up the stairs to Kit's room somewhere in the roof, she had never troubled herself to ascend so far before. She knocked at the door, there was no answer. She tried to turn the handle; the door was locked.

"Kit, Kit! it is I, Constance. Let me in, dear!"

There was no answer at first.

Constance tapped at the door.

"Kit, Kit, dear, you must not refuse to see me!"

Another pause, and then the door was opened, and Kit stood before her cousin.

"What do you want, Constance?" she asked, coldly. She seemed a changed being—a woman full of dignity and grace. Constance felt the change and frowned a little.

"I want to talk to you," she said, and she went into the room.

Kit followed her.

"Why will you quarrel with mamma, Kit?" Constance said, plaintively.

Kit shivered and was silent.

"You know she is difficult, but—"

Kit put out her hand.

"Your mother is a wicked woman!" she said, coldly, quietly. "She has said things to me to-day that I can never forgive, never forget. Let us say no more. I am sorry if you are troubled, Constance; but there are some things one can bear and some one cannot. My life here is one of the latter. I have ended it!"

"But what will you do? You have no money—where can you go?" Constance spoke irritably; she dreaded any sort of a scandal, and she knew her mother's unpopularity.

"I am going to the Rector. He knows me, and will help me to get some living!"

Constance forgot every other feeling in her sudden alarm.

"Kit! you cannot do this! Think of the disgrace!"

The girl smiled bitterly.

"I shall be only fulfilling your mother's words!" she answered.

Constance bit her lip. At all hazards this action must be stopped. What! let the whole county into the secrets of life at the Limes. She knew that Kit was greatly liked by everyone round about, and that there were many who knew the girl's story, and the dislike with which she was regarded by her aunt. And then this would mean that, in all probability, the Rector's wife would offer the girl a temporary home, and her value would be increased by the sympathy that would be showered upon her. Constance's heart beat very fast. She must prevent all this. She rose and went to the girl.

"Kit, do you care for me?" she asked, tenderly.

The girl gave a quick sigh.

"You know I do," she answered, "and I am very, very sorry to—"

"Then," Constance said, her arms about the slender figure, her eyes looking up at the set young face, "then you will do something to please me, darling!"

Kit thrilled at the tender word and tender touch.

"If—if it is not—" she began uncertainly. Poor child, she was not used to so much affection.

Constance saw she had won.

"I am not going to ask you to do anything very hard. I know all you are feeling. I see I know, life here is very difficult for you. I have been sorry for you for a long time, and I will help you all I can, dear, only—you must be a little patient and promise me, however angry you are with my mother, you will not turn against me, and—"

"Oh, Constance!" tears were starting in Kit's glorious eyes, and her whole frame trembled. "You know I will do nothing to hurt you. You are so good. I see now you do care for me! I—I have sometimes thought you did not; but you will forgive me, won't you? I have made a great mistake."

"Care for you, dear little Kit? Why, of course I do, and I will be your best friend—your sister! Now we must think what is best to be done. You cannot go to the Rector—for many reasons—you understand, dear!" Constance was herself again. "We must keep our troubles to ourselves, and if you must really go—if you cannot live here—really—cannot—"

"Oh! Constance, I cannot—I cannot. You see, you know how I feel—it is impossible! Help me to do something for myself. I put myself in your hands, you will help me!"

"I will help you," Constance answered, gently. She was beginning to feel a little contempt for herself for having allowed herself to be troubled even for half an hour about this girl with her pallid, strained face, her tear-stained eyes, and general ugliness. But, all the same, she did not forget Sir Philip's words, and as matters had now developed, she could not help congratulating herself on the events that were to take the girl out of her life, and so dismiss any further prospect of annoyance about her.

"Now, follow my advice. Put on your hat and go out for the day with Chris Hornton; he is down in the garden waiting for you. Stay out quite late, and I will come up and talk with you to-night when you are home. Mamma will not see you, and you can be happy in knowing that I shall be thinking of the best plan to help you to independence, and I hope happiness—poor little Kit!"

Kit kissed the two small hands she held.

"Oh, Constance, how good you are to me! I shall never forget it, never, never; and perhaps someday, who knows? I shall be able to repay you. I pray I may. Oh! I pray I may!" The emotion in her heart glorified her face into sudden beauty.

Constance grew a shade colder.

"Now, run away and trust in me. By to-night I shall have thought of some plan, and will tell you all about it."

She kissed Kit with her false pretty lips,

and herself led the girl down to the garden where Chris was waiting patiently, whistling in a minor key.

Constance watched the boy and girl go down the path, and out of sight; then she turned indoors with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Sir Philip will not see his beauty to-day at all events," she said to herself as she went to her mother's room to offer such consolation as she could think of; "nor any other day," she added with earnestness, "if I manage things well, and I don't think I shall fail—a few tender words and I can twist the young fool which way I like. What good fate was it that made this open rupture between them to-day of all to days? Had it not come, it might have been very difficult to have disposed of Kit; but as it is!" Constance shrugged her shoulders, and then entered her mother's room.

(To be continued.)

HER FATHER'S SECRET.

CHAPTER X.—(continued.)

So absorbed was Sir Hugh in his generous dreams that the time passed by unheeded, but he was at length recalled to himself when a low respectful knock sounded upon the door. In reply to his summons to enter, the worthy ruddy-faced butler, in his quaint attire, entered the room, bowing profoundly.

"I beg your pardon for intruding, Sir Hugh," said the old servitor, carefully closing the door behind him, and advancing towards his young master, "but Miss Chellis insisted upon my coming. She has been waiting for you, sir, a long time in the drawing-room."

"Ah, I had forgotten it," interrupted the young Baronet. "I am very sorry to have kept her waiting. Tell my aunt that I will join her immediately."

"But if you please, Sir Hugh," said the butler, hesitatingly, "Miss Chellis is not pleased at your delay, and has gone to her own rooms. She says if you want to see her you must come to her."

"Very well, I will go to her," replied the Baronet, remembering how punctilious, in regard to exacting due respect and attention from others, was his elderly relative, and realizing that he must have deeply offended her by his forgetfulness to return to her.

Porrocks shifted his position uneasily, but did not make a movement towards the door. Evidently he had something upon his mind which he wished, yet hesitated, to declare.

"Well, what is it, Porrocks?" inquired his master, kindly.

"If—if you please, Sir Hugh, I would like to say something to you," was the hesitating response.

"Speak freely then, Porrocks," said Sir Hugh, with an encouraging smile. "What can I do for you? Raise your salary, or petition Miss Chellis to relieve you of the necessity of wearing that outlandish costume, and provide you with something modern?"

"Outlandish costume!" ejaculated the old butler, involuntarily, in a tone expressive almost of horror. "Outlandish, Sir Hugh?" And he glanced with complacent pride at his knee-breeches, buckled shoes, silk stockings, and the queer spencer that made his bulky form look still larger. "Oh, no, sir, I don't want anything modern. In my humble way I resemble Miss Chellis, sir. She prefers the good old sensible fashions, and so do I, sir."

Considerably amused that the somewhat theatrical costume before him should be considered sensible, the young Baronet said,—

"Then what do you want of me, Porrocks?"

The butler glanced towards the closed door, drew a little nearer his master, and said, in a low tone,—

"Something strange and mysterious has

happened, Sir Hugh. I haven't dared to tell Miss Chellis, for she's nervous like at times, and no wonder, poor lady, at her age. If you hadn't come home to-day, sir, I should have made bold to write to you; though, after all, you may say that I'm only an old fool to be worried about it."

"About what, Porrocks?" inquired Sir Hugh, considerably interested by the manner and words of his attendant.

"You know, Sir Hugh, that more'n once strangers have asked to see Hawk's Nest, and I've shown 'em round to the drive as my poor ability, for the Nest is a place well worth seeing, and showing 'em too, for that matter. 'Tain't often 'at you see a house 'at once so ancient and in such fine repair," said the good man, unconsciously quoting a sentence from the speech with which he usually entertained visitors—"a house 'at's been the abode for hundreds of years of one of the most ancient families in the kingdom—"

"Yes, yes, Porrocks—but what of your mystery?"

"I'm coming to it, Sir Hugh. It was all along of receiving visitors. Day before yesterday, while I was in the housekeeper's room giving an order for something, Miss Chellis wanted particular, one of the servants said as a carriage was coming up the drive as fast as ever the horses could draw it. Thinking that you might have come home of a sudden, sir, and been obliged to took up with one of them hired vehicles from the village, I went to the great hall, and opened the front door wide, so as to receive you, sir, with proper respect. The carriage drove up and stopped, and a lady and her maid got out—"

"A lady and her maid?" cried the Baronet, turning pale, while his heart throbbed tumultuously.

"Yes, Sir Hugh," answered the butler, failing to observe his master's sudden agitation. "One of 'em was a lady, if there ever was one, though she was dressed in plain black silk. She wore a black silk cloak too that nearly covered her dress. She came up the steps, followed by the maid, and said that she was stopping over to the village, and had been driving around to look at the country, and she asked if she might see the Nest. I answered that I would show her around with pleasure; and I hope I didn't do wrong, sir?" added Porrocks, seeing that Sir Hugh had covered his face with his hands, and fearing that he might have incurred his displeasure.

"No, you did rightly enough, Porrocks. But you have described the lady's dress, and haven't said how she looked. Was she dark, and did she have black hair?"

"I don't know sir. I didn't see her face. She wore a thick black veil that was tied like a mask under her chin. I couldn't tell whether she was black or white."

"And the maid?"

"She was veiled too. Her face was covered with a thick brown veil, and she might have had whiskers, for aught I could tell. It was thinking of that, Sir Hugh, after they had gone, that made me resolve to write to you about it. I've heard of men that dressed themselves in women's clothes to gain admittance to a house that they wanted to rob. I can't see why they wore their veils in the house, and spoke so low as if they were afraid of their voices being heard."

"You showed the lady the house then?"

"Yes, Sir Hugh. I took her through the drawing-rooms, the library, and finally to the picture gallery. The lady stayed there longest. I had to tell her all about the Chellis, whose pictures are there, and I must say she listened as if she had been one of the family. When she came to your picture she asked a great many questions—how old you were, what kind of gentleman you were, whether you were kind-hearted and had ever been in love, and so on. It struck me that 'rhaps she was some lady who had fallen in love with you, so I told her all I

could think of about you, how you saved my son's life once, and how everybody loved you."

"What did she say?"

"Nothing, Sir Hugh, but I heard the maid whisper something that sounded like 'what a prize, my lady!' but the lady put up her finger in a warning kind of way, and the maid said no more. They were certainly the mysterious visitors that ever came to the Nest. The lady looked at your picture full ten minutes, and kept a drawin' of me on to talk about you. Then she sighed at last and said she must go. At the door the maid put a sovereign in my hand for my trouble, and very liberal I call it. Then they drove off in the carriage, and I saw that they went back the way they came to the village."

"Did you not learn their names, Porrocks?"

"No, Sir Hugh. They didn't say much to each other."

"I would give fifty pounds to know who the lady was!" cried the young Baronet, perfectly convinced that it was his mysterious bride who had visited his home. "I wish you had followed them, Porrocks."

"So I did, Sir Hugh," returned the worthy butler. "Thinkin' that the lady might be someone who was secretly in love with you, I determined to find out who she was; so as soon as I could I rode after them on your bay horse, my cob not being lively enough to follow the carriage. They had considerably the start, for the idea of following them didn't occur to me till they had been gone near an hour, but I rode as fast as possible, and got to the village just after the lady and her maid had left it by the express train. I saw the coachman, and he told me that the lady had come out of one train and engaged him directly to take her to the Nest, and that she had not been stopping at the village at all. That made me think that she had come a purpose to visit the Nest, and I began to be afraid I'd done wrong in showin' her over it."

"So you got to the station too late?" said the Baronet, in a tone expressive of disappointment. "It's a pity you did not find out where she took her ticket to."

"She had a return ticket, Sir Hugh, so I was foiled there. But I found out from one of those fellows that are always hanging around stations that the lady told the guard, when he asked for her destination, that she was going to West Hoxton."

"West Hoxton!" repeated Sir Hugh, as if committing the name to memory. "West Hoxton. Let me see—I have heard the name somewhere."

"I looked it out on the map, sir, and found that it was a very small village at the south of England. Perhaps you know who the lady was, Sir Hugh?"

"Yes, I know who she is," said the Baronet, thoughtfully. "That is, I think I do, though it's very little I know concerning her. You're a good faithful fellow, Porrocks, to look after my interests as you have done, and I know that the best reward I can offer you is the assurance of my friendship and confidence."

The eyes of the old servitor glistened through grateful tears, and he looked towards Sir Hugh with an expression made up of affection, tenderness and respect.

"I am happy to deserve your confidence, Sir Hugh," he said, his voice trembling.

"You do deserve it, Porrocks!" replied his young master, with earnestness. "You are a good-hearted fellow, and one of my best friends. The Nest would not be home without you. But there—there!" he added, hastily, as the butler's face began to work agitatedly, "I must go and visit my aunt, you know, or I shall deserve her displeasure!"

He arose, held out his hand with graceful kindness to his faithful servitor, and then turned to a pier-glass, ostensibly to retouch some portion of his attire, but really to give Porrocks a chance to recover himself.

When that object had been accomplished he turned round with a gay remark, and after enjoining the butler to say nothing to anyone

of the visit of the mysterious veiled lady, he quitted the room and sought his aunt's apartments.

As has been said, they were situated at the opposite extremity of the house, and to reach them Sir Hugh was compelled to traverse several halls and corridors.

"I suppose," he thought as he walked along, "that my bride has walked recently where I am walking now! Oh! if I had only been at home! I wonder why she visited the Nest? It was the day after our marriage that she came, and before she paid me the promised money. Was her object to make herself familiar with my character and history? Did she want to learn whether her husband bore an honourable reputation, or had she some fear that I had claimed a name I had no right to bear? Yes, that must have been her reason."

By the time he had attained this decision he had reached the corridor from which the rooms of his grand-aunt opened. Knocking at one of the doors, he was bidden to enter, and he hastened to obey the command.

The room in which he found himself was Miss Chellis's private parlour. It looked, like the lady herself, as if it might have been transplanted from a former century. The furniture was all of the cumbersome yet incongruous sort in vogue a hundred years ago. There were massive tables resting upon slender legs, which terminated in claw-feet; there were card-tables, ungainly book-shelves, heavy damask curtains, and a Turkey carpet that was evidently no recent acquisition, and which yet looked bright and handsome.

Yet, despite the fact that the furniture was ancient, the room had a pleasant home-like air which attracted Sir Hugh at a glance. It might have been due to the afternoon sunlight streaming in through the diamond-panes of the latticed window, or to the flowers filling the parian vases on the mantel-piece, or to the bright bits of Berlin embroidery that lay upon the pretty work-basket in front of the easy-chair, or to the thousand and one pleasant evidences of refined feminine occupancy—but, to whatever it was due, there was certainly an undefinable charm that could never be found in the bachelor apartments of Sir Hugh.

It may be safely said that, at this particular moment, this charm was not due to the presence of its proprietress, for Miss Dorothy Chellis sat back in her stuffed chair, with a displeased expression on her countenance and a dissatisfied and offended look in her bright black eyes.

"So you've come at last, Hugh!" she said, ungraciously, as her grand-nephew advanced. The young Baronet bowed gravely.

"I suppose I may attribute your visit to Porrocks's intercession?" continued the little lady, even more ungraciously. "I told him to tell you that I had become tired of waiting for you, and yet you have delayed almost an hour after receiving my message. If you think that such conduct is going to accomplish anything for you—if you think it will cause me to burn my present will and make another—you are entirely mistaken!"

"My dear Aunt Dorothy!" exclaimed Sir Hugh somewhat impatiently, a flush suffusing itself over his fine face. "If I had hastened to you before, you would have said that I was trying to ingratiate myself in your favour. I have been occupied, and have come at my earliest convenience. As to your will, make it in favour of the Fijis, or Hottentots, if you will, but don't suspect me continually of designs upon your property. Not all your money would tempt me to lead a life of hypocrisy to obtain it. I am rich enough, I hope, to be honest, and to say what I mean!"

He spoke in such a manly tone that Miss Chellis looked at him with astonishment. She noticed then that though his face was pale, from the effects of long dissipation, that it had yet a nobleness of expression she had never before observed upon it. His blue eyes met hers with a frankness and candour that would have been impossible had he spoken untruth-

fully, and there was in his manner a gravity and earnestness that reminded her of Sir Hugh's late father.

Unconsciously she lost her offended and displeased look, and her voice was quite soft as she said,—

"You are more like your father than I thought, Hugh. If you choose to give up your wild associates and become a quiet country gentleman, like your father was, I am willing to forget that you have ever been anything else. I am not saying I shall change my will, mind. As you are so rich and independent you won't care for my money. Don't interrupt me. Did I understand you to say that you were going to stay at the Nest?"

Sir Hugh replied in the affirmative.

"How long? Until you have won my affection, or tired of your whim?" And the little lady eyed him keenly.

"I cannot read the future," said Sir Hugh. "I came home with the intention of remaining here. Your presence at the Nest made but little difference in my resolves, although, of course, it will give me pleasure to care for my only living relative—"

"Humph! rather late in the day, I think."

"But better late than not at all, Aunt Dorothy! still if you have no faith in my sincerity or my presence be displeasing to you, you shall not be troubled by me. I will keep to my own side of the house, and shall not forget that, by my grandfather's will, this suite of rooms is your own for the term of your natural life!"

"Thank you, Hugh, but your presence is not distasteful to me," said his elder relative. "I like to study people. You have changed greatly since I saw you last, two years ago. What has happened to you?"

"Oh, I have awakened, that's all!" and Sir Hugh laughed bitterly. "I have tried my town friends and found that I had not chosen them well. And I have determined to begin again!"

Miss Chellis scrutinized his face very narrowly, and a scarcely perceptible look of satisfaction appeared in her bright black eyes.

"I am glad to hear it!" she said. "It is time you began anew. But you are young, Hugh, and can make yourself as good and true a gentleman as your father was. I fear, though, that you will soon tire of what you used to call a hum-drum country existence. After town gaieties, six months a year in the country will drag heavily. I know what you need, Hugh, better than you know yourself—you want a wife!"

Sir Hugh moved back out of the sunlight, and shaded his face with his aunt's fan.

"Yes, you want a wife, Hugh. The letter which Porrocks delivered to you was a request for you to return. I wanted to urge you to marry. If I could see you settled down with a family growing around you, I should be content about your future life."

"But I don't want a wife."

"You don't know what you want. You must not be foolish, Hugh," and Miss Chellis's voice grew harsh at the first sign of opposition to a plan she had been cherishing for weeks. "Now, nephew, I will make you a proposition. If you will bring home a wife to the Nest, I'll burn my will in favour of the African mission."

"But where shall I find a wife?" exclaimed the Baronet, with a forced laugh.

"Why, there are plenty of suitable young ladies. I stipulate that your wife must be well born and well bred. If you were to enter into a *mésalliance* I should never forgive you."

Sir Hugh had been upon the point of confiding to her the story of his secret marriage, but her latest words chilled the confession upon his lips. He remembered that he knew nothing of the birth or family of his bride, and also remembered that his grand aunt was a woman of strong prejudices and indomitable pride.

"Well, Aunt Dorothy, I will think the matter over," he replied, with assumed care-

lessness, "and let you know my decision in the course of a few weeks."

"Remember," said Miss Chellis, impressively, "that the marriage is not to be a *malice*, and remember, too, that if you don't marry I shall keep my present will. No wife—no money!"

Sir Hugh's curiosity was stronger in his soul than a desire to introduce a Lady Chellis to the world. As might have been expected, when he quitted his aunt a few minutes later, he was strong in the determination to visit West Hoxton immediately.

CHAPTER XI.

Alone! alone! that worn-out word,
So idly spoken, and so coldly heard;
Yet all that poets sing, and grief hath known,
Of hope laid waste, knells in that word—alone!

The New Timon.

We will now direct the attention of the reader to the unknown and mysterious bride of Sir Hugh Chellis.

The moment after waving her adieu to the bewildered Baronet she sank back upon the cushions of the vehicle she had entered, dropped her head upon her breast, and assumed an attitude expressive of the deepest sadness.

"What must he think of me?" she murmured, so faintly that her maid could not catch the import of her words. "He must deem me unwomanly—an adventuresome perhaps, who desires to conceal her infamy under an honorable name! If he had not been utterly reckless and oppressed with debts, he would have repulsed my offer with scorn. He chose between a marriage with me and a debtor's prison, or a suicide's grave. It is not pleasant to think of it!"

She seemed to shrink within herself, and drew closer about her figure the long dark cloak that completely concealed her bridal robes.

After a moment or two of apparently bitter self-communing she said aloud, with a faint smile—

"Well, Nelly, how did you like my bridegroom?"

"He is a splendid-looking gentleman, miss that is, my lady," replied the maid, with enthusiasm. "I am sure you couldn't have chosen better if you had had a hundred lovers to choose from. And he's a Baronet too! It does seem as though Providence had guided your ladyship, for you might have married a wicked man, or one old enough to be your grandfather!"

"It would have been all the same," said the lady, wearily. "I did not want a husband, Nelly. It was necessary that I should marry within three days, and I should have married a hod-carrier, if such a person had been the only husband I could have obtained!"

"Yes, my lady; but surely you are pleased that your husband is a gentleman?"

"Hush, Nelly; do not address me by that title. I feel as if I had no right to it. Besides, it only serves to remind me at what a sacrifice of maidenly delicacy I have gained it. The name of Lady Chellis is abhorrent to me!"

The maid was about to make some reply when her quick ears caught the sound made by the purring cab, in which Sir Hugh was following his bride. With an exclamation of terror she looked out from the window and cried—

"Someone is following us, miss. It can't be him."

"No, it is Sir Hugh!" said the bride, quietly. "I thought he would follow me. It is not natural he should. Tell the driver to elude pursuit, and he shall have double pay!"

The maid obeyed the command, and the vehicle proceeded at an increased rate of speed.

"Mine has been a strange bridal!" murmured the lady, sorrowfully. "In my walking girl's dreams I sometimes thought of

marriage, but I never, never pictured an occurrence like this! I never imagined that I should flee from the altar, pursued by a husband of whom I should know nothing but his name. I hope I shall never see him again. I could not bear to meet his gaze!"

"Why not look on the bright side, miss?" said the maid, affectionately. "It is true that you have done something extraordinary, but you have a good and sufficient reason for your actions. If Sir Hugh Chellis knew the truth, he would respect and admire you!"

The lady made a gesture of impatience.

"At least, miss, think of your uncle, and how you have outwitted him!" exclaimed Nelly. "You are your own mistress now, and no one dare molest you. It is for you to dictate, and for others to obey!"

"Yes thank heaven, the hour of my triumph has come at last!" exclaimed the bride, with a long inspiration, as if realizing for the first time that she was breathing the air of freedom. "At last—at last!"

She shook off the burden resting upon her, drew herself upright, and clasped her hands in thankful prayerfulness.

It was noticeable that the tones she employed in speaking were very different from those she had used in conversing with Sir Hugh—they were purer, deeper and richer now.

"At last I am free!" she repeated, her voice tremulous with joy. "Free to do as I please—free to come and go—to rule over my household—to reward you, my faithful Nelly, my true-hearted foster-sister!" And she pressed the hand of her maid with grateful affection.

"I have had my reward in assisting to secure your happiness, miss," was the reply of Nelly as she wiped her eyes under her veil. "But where are we now?" she added as the vehicle proceeded more slowly. "Can Sir Hugh be overtaking us?"

Again looking from the window, she discovered that they were in a crowded street, and that the pursuing cab was not in sight.

She hastened to inform her mistress of this.

"Let the cabman set us down here," said the lady, quickly. "Before Sir Hugh can have turned the corner we shall have disappeared!"

The driver was signalled, the vehicle stopped, the fare hastily settled, and the bride and her attendant entered an adjacent shop, from the window of which they soon beheld Sir Hugh, as he passed in pursuit.

They waited a few minutes, ostensibly for the purpose of making some trivial purchases, and then entered the street again, summoned another cab, and resumed their journey.

The course taken by the cabman, in obedience to the maid's directions, was towards the West end, and the narrow business streets were soon exchanged for wider and more fashionable avenues.

As they neared their destination the lady became nervous and agitated, and Nelly endeavoured to inspire her with the courage that had sustained her throughout the trying scenes of the morning.

It was doubtful if the bride was conscious of the efforts of her attendant to soothe and encourage her. But as they entered Albemarle Street she regained her self-possession, loosened her hold of Nelly's hand, and was in a moment, quiet, dignified, and thorough mistress of herself.

"Here we are!" she said, as the cab stopped before a stately dwelling, and the driver hastened to open the door, after having rung at the mansion. "Have no fears, Nelly. I am mistress of the situation!"

She alighted and walked slowly up the marble steps, followed by her attendant, who had lingered an instant to dismiss the cabman.

She had scarcely gained the threshold when the door opened abruptly, and she was admitted by a tall, powdered footman, into a handsome hall, on each side of which opened a series of doors.

Nelly followed her mistress as closely as possible, as if to guard her.

"I wish to see Mr. Wilmer," said the lady, in the same tones she had used when speaking to Sir Hugh.

"What name?" inquired the footman, with a puzzled glance at the incongruous attire of the visitor.

The lady hesitated, and then said, quietly—

"Tell Mr. Wilmer that Lady Chellis desires to see him. I will wait here until you have given him my message."

The footman with an obsequious bow, disappeared leaving the lady alone with her maid.

"Now, Nelly, take off my cloak," said the bride, hurriedly.

The maid obeyed, removing the cumbersome outer-garment, and bestowing it carelessly upon a velvet ottoman. She then shook out the heavy folds of her mistress's bridal veil, letting it fall around her snowy dress, like a white cloud, and permitting it completely to conceal the lady's face.

"Your ladyship looks the very picture of a bride," whispered Nelly, admiringly, when she had spread out the ample train of the bridal robe. "And you look even more like a queen!"

"Hush, Nelly!" returned the lady. "We may be overheard. Do you not hear signs of confusion upstairs? I suppose my escape has been discovered!"

The maid assented, as the trampling of feet and shutting of doors was heard in the upper corridors, and answered—

"It must have been discovered an hour ago, my lady. They are only searching now, because they can't bear to think that you have entirely escaped. But here comes Wilson, I wonder he does not suspect who we are!"

The next moment the footman made his appearance and announced that Mr. Wilmer would be happy to see Lady Chellis in the drawing-room.

The man looked astonished at the transformation wrought in her ladyship's appearance, but, without noticing him, the bride paused before a long panelled mirror, gave a hasty glance at the radiant vision she presented, and then, with a stately step, followed his guidance to the drawing-room door.

He then ushered her into the saloon, giving ingress also to the devoted maid.

It was a magnificent room, or series of rooms, in which the bride found herself—a vast saloon, divided by curtains of crimson and gold velvet into three elegant drawing-rooms. These curtains were festooned with cords and tassels of bullion, so that a view of all the rooms was permitted to the occupant of either. The walls and ceiling were painted in fresco, and life-like figures seemed to bend down from above, flinging garlands to the newly made bride. A great chandelier, with a thousand pendant lustres, depended from the centre of the ceiling. The windows were curtained with lace and crimson satin, and the warm glow overspreading everything was enhanced by the gorgeous Eastern fabric covering the floor and meeting the steps of the intruders.

There were two occupants of the first drawing-room.

One of these was Mr. Wilmer, the gentleman for whom the lady had inquired. He arose and came forward at her entrance, his countenance expressive of astonishment at the visit of this white-robed figure.

His personal appearance was decidedly unprepossessing. He was thin and spare. He was tall, and appeared taller than he was, because of his thinness. His features were all sharp, and his eyes—of a pale, uncertain hue—were shifting and uneasy in their glances. His forehead was high but narrow, and was crowned by a thin and slight display of hay-coloured hair.

He seemed to be suffering under some heavy and sudden blow, and though he endeavoured to smile as he approached his guest, it

was easy to see that the smile was forced and unnatural.

"Lady Chellis, I believe?" said Mr. Wilmer, in a perturbed voice, and apparently scarcely conscious of what he said.

The mysterious bride bowed gravely.

"Allow me to introduce to your ladyship Mrs. Barrat, the friend and companion of my niece!" remarked the host, as the visitor turned her head in the direction of the second occupant of the drawing-room.

Mrs. Barrat arose and acknowledged the introduction by a profound and even obsequious bow.

She was a woman still young, and endowed with a certain order of beauty—a style, however, that would never appeal to the admiration of a refined mind. Her bold black eyes, her red cheeks, her full lips, and her inelegant figure, had something of coarseness in them all, and this coarseness was made farther apparent by her endeavours to feel and appear at her ease in the presence of a titled lady.

The bride glanced at her but an instant, and then, with a quick gesture of aversion, turned towards Mr. Wilmer.

"Your niece?" repeated the veiled lady, in her assumed voice, and with an accent of inquiry.

"Yes, your ladyship; Mrs. Barrat is companion to my niece, Miss Adah Holte Wilmer."

"Is—is your niece at home?" inquired the visitor.

A shadow overspread Mr. Wilmer's face, a heavy frown contracted his brows, and he seemed suddenly distressed and anxious.

"I regret to say that my niece has disappeared most unaccountably, and only this very morning!" he exclaimed. "But I have sent most of my servants in search of her, and have also employed a detective to trace her and bring her home. I expect her return every moment."

"A detective in search of her?" inquired the veiled lady, a thrill of exaltation pulsing through her tones as she remembered that she was married.

"Yes, and he cannot fail to discover her. Was your visit intended for my poor niece, Lady Chellis?"

The young bride bowed assent.

"Indeed!" said the host, looking at her uneasily, and endeavouring to pierce with his keen eyes through the veil shrouding her features. "My niece does not see company, Lady Chellis. I have been obliged to deny her dearest and oldest friends all access to her presence for years. Her mother's relatives—and they are few and distant—have not seen her for a considerable time!"

The veiled lady uttered an exclamation of surprise, and ventured upon an inquiry as to the cause of Miss Wilmer's seclusion.

"Her health is so delicate—both physical and mental," replied Mr. Wilmer, putting his handkerchief to his eyes, while Mrs. Barrat seemed to experience a sudden emotion of grief. "She has been obliged for years to keep her room. But pray be seated, Lady Chellis. Pardon my apparent inhospitality, but, in truth, I can think of nothing and no one save my poor afflicted niece, who is wandering no one knows where. She is suffering under an aberration of mind, such as darkened the last days of her poor father, my elder brother. She inherited from him a predisposition to insanity, and for several years she has been subject to fits of violent fury, when even I, of whom she is at times extravagantly fond, have feared to approach her."

As she listened to this tale the veiled young bride pressed the hand of her maid, as if to give vent in silence to the indignation that could not be wholly repressed; and Nelly with difficulty restrained herself from pouring out a torrent of reproaches upon the uncle and guardian of her mistress.

Impressed by the silence of his guests, Mr. Wilmer looked nervous and anxious.

"You are Lady Chellis, I think you said," he remarked, with an endeavour to speak

carelessly. "Are you a member of the ancient Welsh family of the same name?"

"I am!" declared the bride, in her low, assumed tones. "My husband is Sir Hugh Chellis, of Hawk's Nest!"

Mr. Wilmer became pale, and started.

"The Chellises were formerly friends of the Wilmers—very devoted friends," he said, trying to conceal the fears her announcement had aroused. "I believe the friendship originated in a love-affair between my uncle and Miss Dorothy Chellis, who was a great beauty in her day. She must be old now, if living. My uncle died before the time appointed for the marriage, but Miss Chellis always remained single for his sake. She was very fond of my brother in his youth, and she wrote me a letter of condolence after learning that my poor niece had succumbed to the malady inherited from her father, the late Mr. Wilmer. Perhaps you are come to see Miss Wilmer on account of Miss Chellis?"

Mrs. Barrat had been watching the intruders with a keen hawk-like gaze, and, as the veiled lady arose at this juncture, the ex-governess came forward, caught Mr. Wilmer's arm, and was about to whisper something in his ear, when she was startled by the manner of Lady Chellis.

The mysterious bride of Sir Hugh took a step forward, threw back her veil, and stood before them with flashing eyes and lips quivering with indignation.

She was exceedingly beautiful, with scarlet colour flickering in and out of her clear cheeks, with her glorious dark eyes radiant with light, a haughty scorn expressed in every feature, and her slender figure grown suddenly replete with grace and majesty.

If she had looked beautiful in the dull light of a single street lamp, with her face shaded by her dark bonnet, what words could describe her appearance now in her sweeping bridal robes, and surrounded by her cloud-like veil?

Then she had been the impersonation of night—now she resembled the glorious and sunlit morning.

The sight of her face seemed almost to paralyze her host.

"Adah!" he gasped, retreating a step in his astonishment and bewilderment.

"Yes, I am Adah," said Lady Chellis, proudly and fearlessly. "I am Adah, come to her rightful home to reign as mistress, Mr. Wilmer."

He did not seem to hear the last sentence. "You have done well in returning, Adah," he said, as soon as he could find his voice.

"And your companion—who is she?" The maid withdrew her veil, revealing a comely face, full of honesty and goodness.

"As I suspected!" exclaimed the ex-governess, with an angry look at Nelly. "It was you then who assisted your mistress to escape? I might have known better than to trust you, when you pretended to believe in Miss Wilmer's insanity."

Nelly replied only by an exasperating glance of defiance that startled as well as angered Mrs. Barrat.

Mr. Wilmer breathed more freely on discovering that his niece had returned to her home without any other protector or defender than her, and his voice was harsh and unpleasant as he demanded,—

"What means all this mummerly about your dress, Adah? Anyone to look at you now would conclude at once that you were not in your right mind. Why, you have tricked yourself out like a bride!"

"Because I am one!" declared Lady Chellis, in a clear sweet tone, that sounded like the silvery melody of a bell.

"You a bride! Why, you have never had even a lover! You have not seen for six years the face of any man save myself. You have no acquaintances. Your friends and your father's friends would shrink with fear if they were to meet you and know that you were at liberty. You a bride! Your brain has given away at last, I believe," and Mr. Wilmer spoke sincerely, so improbable seemed to him

the fact of Adah's marriage. "Have you been wandering about the streets in that guise during the hours you have been missing? I wonder you were not—Well," he added, pleased with a sudden thought, "it may be as well, after all, that you have made this escapade—as well, I mean, for me. This going about in bridal attire will be quoted as one of your mad freaks. At first, when I discovered how you had escaped, with the aid of that treacherous creature," and he pointed to Nelly, "I was angry enough to have—I was very angry. I suppose you have had enough of freedom and of friends, haven't you?"

"I have not been to any of my family friends," said Lady Chellis. "I knew very well that you had forestalled any communication I might make to them, and that they would only return me to you. Instead of that, I have been to get married."

Mr. Wilmer smiled incredulously. "You seem to forget, Adah," he said, "that I am as well, and perhaps better, acquainted with the English marriage laws than yourself. You have been absent from home about three hours, more or less. During that period, to make your words true, you would have been obliged to find a gentleman willing to marry you; then to obtain a special licence, and finally to proceed to the church and obtain the clergyman's services. All these things could not possibly take place in three hours. You know nobody. Gentlemen do not propose marriage to strange ladies at first sight, and submit to be led to the altar within the hour. You are mad, my poor Adah!"

"I am not mad, and you know it!" interrupted Lady Chellis, with a calm smile of conscious power. "And I am legally married by special licence. It may assist your belief of my statement if I tell you that I have not been out of my rooms to-day for the first time. Yesterday, when you were at a dinner-party, and Mrs. Barrat had gone to visit a friend, leaving me in charge of my faithful Nelly, I made my escape, and enjoyed my freedom three or four hours, while Nelly personated me at home, in case of your return—"

Mr. Wilmer bestowed a menacing glance upon Nelly, and Mrs. Barrat looked equally threatening, but the faithful maid did not appear intimidated by either. So long as her mistress's courage remained, her own would not fail. Besides, she possessed unlimited faith in the marriage certificate which Lady Chellis carried next her heart.

"During my absence of last night I encountered a young gentleman who agreed to marry me this morning, and to meet me with a special licence in his pocket—"

"Incredible!" ejaculated Mr. Wilmer. "Do you mean that a strange gentleman, whom you met for the first time, and in the street, immediately proposed marriage?"

"No," replied Lady Chellis, a faint shadow passing over the brilliancy of her beauty and then vanishing, "it was I who proposed marriage. I knew that I must be married within three days if I would frustrate your wicked schemes. When I went out I was determined to find a husband, no matter how poor and ignorant he might be. Nothing could be worse than my life here—nothing could be worse than to become a pensioner on your bounty. Perhaps I was unwomanly," here she spoke as if to herself, "but he met my advances in a frank, manly spirit, and promised he would marry me this morning. This morning Nelly and I, dressed as we are now, except that I wore a dark cloak and bonnet, made our escape from this house. We went first to a milliner's for a white bonnet, then to a money-lender's, where I pledged my jewels—those left me by my godmother—"

"Hear her!" cried Mr. Wilmer, pale with anger and alarm. "Can this extraordinary story be true?"

"It is perfectly true, as you are about to find to your cost, Mr. Wilmer!"

"His name?"

"Sir Hugh Chellis, of Hawk's Nest. Consequently you see that I am a member of the same family as Miss Dorothy Chellis, of whom you spoke a few minutes since!"

And the bride smiled.

"Proofs—proofs!" cried the baffled guardian, as he sank, livid and ghastly, into a chair.

"What proofs can you desire? The church register is doubtless open to your investigations. But I have other proofs at hand, which you may see. Here is the certificate of my marriage."

She withdrew the document from her bosom, unfolded it, scanned it herself, and then advanced and placed it before the eyes of her uncle.

He seized it eagerly, and looked at it with a keen and almost despairing gaze.

Mrs. Barrat silently approached him and looked over his shoulder.

There was no doubting the authenticity of the document. The plain statement, the different signatures of the clergyman and witnesses, attested to its genuineness, and as he regarded it a fearful expression darkened the visage of the guardian.

"Outwitted!" he muttered, letting the paper fall from his nervous hands—"outwitted by a mere girl, one who knows nothing of the world, who has been shut up for six years in close confinement! It is too hard to bear!"

Lady Chellis stooped and picked up the paper that was to her the sign and token of a blessed deliverance from a life of torture, and restored it to her bosom.

"Outwitted!" repeated her uncle, adding, as his gaze fell upon the ex-governess, "and it is to you, Mrs. Barrat, that I owe the fact! If you had stayed with your charge last evening as usual, she would not have ruined me!"

The ex-governess retreated from her employer in affright at his dark looks and despairing manner, and Lady Chellis, after a moment's farther silence, said,—

"You need not spend time, Mr. Wilmer, in exchanging reprimands with the woman who has only served you too well. I have much to say to you. Let us come to the point at once."

Mr. Wilmer lifted his head as if wondering what Lady Chellis could have to say to him now that she was freed from his authority, and the ex-governess crept nearer, in order to hear more clearly the proposed communication.

CHAPTER XII.

Wise men ne'er sit and wail their loss,
But cheerily seek how to redress their harm.
Shakespeare.

ILDE DARE was in her own private room, the front chamber over Sir Allyn's study. All around her were evidences of her father's love and care.

The pretty blue silk hangings on the walls, the sunny pictures, the costly ornaments and *bijouterie* interlarding the tables and mantelpiece, had all been chosen by him.

He had loved to surround her with everything choice and beautiful, and nothing had been deemed too rare or costly for his darling. As a result her room was a perfect fairy bower, in which was gathered a host of pretty treasures, and all the delicate appliances of luxury.

The crowning beauty of the apartment was its large, deep oriel window, looking out upon the lawn and towards the distant road. Filmy lace curtains shut off this little retreat, which was furnished with a silken lounge, and a movable bookstand well laden with handsomely bound volumes. Here among the ample cushions in this sunny little nook Ilde had dreamed away, as maidens will, many a leisure hour. Her purr thoughts, her sweetest dreams, her dearest hopes, had all been conceived here.

She occupied it now, but it was not to indulge in happy reveries. Her head was hidden among the cushions, her face was concealed by her rippling hair, upon which the vagrant beams of sunshine played, and her attitude expressed misery, almost despair.

The words of Therwell, assuring her that her father's fate depended upon her self-sacrifice, were ringing in her ears, and she could not shut them out.

"His life is at stake!" she whispered, with a shudder, as if fearful that the very air would hear her and repeat the terrible secret. "My father's life is forfeit to the law, and I can save him! What can he have done that this sacrifice should be demanded of me? But I will not doubt him—poor papa! I will save him!"

She spoke the words tremulously, and then moaned pitifully.

She scarcely knew herself how much it cost her to say them. But in her girlish visions she had dreamed of a lover, gallant and young, like Lord Trevelian, and her heart clung to the idol it had created. It had seemed to her that day, when the young Viscount had looked tenderly and hopefully into her eyes, and reminded her of her childish promise to become his wife, that he was the lover of whom she had dreamed, and her heart thrilled with a vague, undefinable sense of bliss.

But now it was weighed down with misery.

"It cannot be," she exclaimed, with sudden and passionate resistance against the fate marked out for her, "it cannot be that I must become the wife of this man, when my whole being rises up against him! He has made my father's hair turn gray—he has bowed his form with grief and dread—he has wrecked his life, his usefulness, his happiness! He is my deadly enemy, and seeks to wed me in order to humble my father and to possess himself of our wealth! I am afraid of him! I almost hate him! Oh, I cannot marry him!"

She half-arose to a sitting posture, clasped her hands in anguish, and added, more calmly,—

"There must be some way of escape for me. There must be some other rescue for my father. This man is bad and vile, and it is said that the wicked shall not always triumph. Surely his evil work must be almost ended. I had rather die than marry him. Marry him!" she repeated, her voice acquiring strength and power. "I will marry him if I must, in order to save my father, but not until I have tried every other means of saving papa. I will not submit to this man's demands without a struggle. He has granted me a month in which to prepare for my marriage with him, and, during that month, I will use every energy to free my father and myself from his wretched tyranny. And then if he led me to the altar I shall take with me the consciousness that human efforts were all unavailing to secure my freedom!"

Her face glowed with this new resolution, her hazel eyes flashed with determination, and her slender figure became instinct with sudden hopefulness and energy.

She passed her hand over her forehead as if to clear away the influence of her late benumbing despair, and thought.

"It seems to me that papa would be safe if that paper upon which the fatal compact was written were only destroyed. It must be of great importance, for Therwell said he knew too much to bring it here, and that he had left it at Oakshaw. That paper must contain some acknowledgment which would criminate my father. If I could only obtain it!"

She gave herself up to thought, but it was evident by the colour that kindled and then faded from her cheeks, and by the light that now and then shone from her dark eyes, that she was maturing a plan by which to gain possession of the paper upon which so much depended.

At last she arose, put back her dishevelled hair with her hands, and looked from the win-

dow thoughtfully, and like one who looks with the mental rather than physical gaze.

"I must consult with papa," she mused. "I will go to him—"

She paused and started as a faint, timid rap, which she well knew, sounded upon her door.

Before she could take a step forward or utter a word, Sir Allyn Dare entered her room, and advanced with a slow and uneven step to the window.

Idle put aside the curtains to give him free ingress, and then gave him a seat upon the couch, while she continued standing.

The Baronet looked more than ever haggard, but there was a quietness about him now that showed how he had been worn out by his struggles. He looked weary, and utterly hopeless, as if at last he had resigned himself to his apparent destiny.

He had evidently expected to find his daughter in tears, and seemed surprised to see her calm and resolute.

"Idle," he said, timidly, and as if hardly daring to put the question, "do you despise me for my miserable weakness?"

"Despise you, papa!" cried Ilde. "You know that I love you and honour you."

She came to him, and kissed his forehead in a tender pitying way that brought the ready tears to his eyes.

"I own that I was weak years ago," he said, "but there was a fearful combination against me. I could never have proved my innocence. But I would have held out against Therwell, if there had not been so many chances that he might never appear again. I never had a serious idea of marrying you to him."

"I believe you, papa."

"I am innocent, Ilde!" and her father's voice was full of pleading. "I am innocent of all wrong-doing. You believe me, do you not?"

Ilde looked into his beseeching eyes, and read in them the unstained record of his gentle soul. With a smile that warmed his half-frozen heart she assured him of her belief in his innocence, and then, with that tender motherliness that characterized her manner towards him, she drew his head down upon the pillows, and passed her hands, with a soft, magnetic touch, over his hot forehead.

"Dear papa," she said, gently, "if you had that paper upon which your compact with Therwell was written, would you not be freed for ever from his clutches?"

"I wish I had it!" he replied eagerly. "I might then make terms with my enemy. If that were gone the case would not be so dark against me. I was half mad when I signed it, Ilde. In case of a trial, if Therwell were to proceed to extremities, that paper would go heavily against me, for it would be interpreted as a personal acknowledgment of my guilt! If I could only get it!" And his voice died away wearily as he imagined that his wishes were vain.

"If the paper were destroyed, papa, would you not be freed? Could you not then defy Therwell?"

"No, Ilde. Even if the paper were out of the way—and I would give half of my possessions to secure it—there are still three lives between me and safety!"

"Three lives, papa? I do not understand you."

"There are three witnesses against me, Ilde—three false witnesses, one of whom is Therwell. The others are his accomplices and the instruments of his will!"

"Who are they?" asked Ilde, her heart sinking at this revelation.

"One is Hoadley, the keeper of the Dare Arms, at Edenville. He was once employed in the family, but I could not of course retain him after—after I found out what he was. He insisted upon having the lease of the Dare Arms at the price of his silence, and I was only too glad to purchase it on those terms."

"So Hoadley is leagued with Therwell

against you, papa? I have often thought it strange that you allowed him to keep the inn, when he has been at times insolent and disrespectful. Where is the remaining witness, and where is he?"

"I do not know where he is. His name is Shawcross. He was of a wandering disposition, and, if alive, may be at this moment at the South Pole or among the Arctic regions. It is ten years since I heard of or from him, and then he was about to set out upon a long journey. He promised me faithfully that he would never return, but I have always believed that he would."

"Shawcross! It's an odd name, papa," said the girl. "I know that Hoadley was once grandpapa's valet, but who was this Shawcross?"

A strange look came over the pale face of the Baronet—a look composed of fear and hesitation—and then he said, hastily:

"Do not ask me, Ilde. Yet why should I not tell you? He was your grandfather's nurse in his last long illness!"

The maiden started, became paler, and Sir Allyn felt her hands tremble upon his forehead, over which they had continued to rest soothingly.

He shrank away from her, and looked up with agonised beseeching into her face, and encountered a look at once so tender, so trustful, so reverent, that he caught his breath quickly to suppress the choking sob that rose in his throat.

"Papa," said Ilde, firmly, "we must secure possession of that paper immediately. Therwell says he will give it up as soon as I become his wife, but I do not intend to wait a month for it. Besides, father, I may never marry him. Do not look frightened. I am going to try to get rid of his demands without sacrificing myself. Be hopeful in secret, father, for heaven will surely assist me in battling with Therwell. I am going to search for that document!"

(To be continued.)

CONSTANCE CAREW.

CHAPTER I.

EMANCIPATED.

"WHEN shall we three meet again?" asks Margaret Sanderson. She speaks in the sentimental tone adopted by some of the bigger girls in the collegiate school presided over by Miss Mary Barlow and her sister Caroline.

"Echo answers when?" sighs Edith Culver.

"We shall never meet again as we are now!" remarks Constance Carew, thoughtfully.

She is the tallest of the three girls, who, with arms entwined, are slowly pacing the length of the green lawn that lies in front of Denborough House, Hampstead.

"Never!" repeat her companions, in dismay.

"No, never as we are now!" she re-asserts.

"We are all leaving school for the last time!" she continues, thoughtfully. "You, Maggie, are going to India next month to be married. You, Edith, go directly from here to a situation as a governess; and I return to my father's house to be mistress of it until I am of age, unless I marry in the interval."

There is an unconscious air of pride and superiority in her tone, which she would not for world's sake have there if she knew it, and, therefore, she is a little hurt when Edith Culver, who is irritated thereby, says, bitterly,—

"Yes, we are not all heiresses like you. I must earn my bread by the sweat of my brow, probably by the wringing of my heart also, whilst you will live a life of idleness and luxury, reaping what you have not sowed,

without a trouble or a worry except of your own making!"

"It is scarcely fair of you to talk like that, Edith!" replies Constance, reproachfully.

"You know that I cannot help your being poor, any more than I can help one day being rich myself. As you truly say, I didn't make the money, neither have I robbed you of it!"

"I didn't say that you had!" retorts Edith, gloomily, "I only stated facts!"

"One fact I must dispute!" continues Constance, in her unconsciously superior tone. "I am sure to have troubles and worries without making them. People in every rank and condition of life have those without any fault of their own!"

"Don't you two quarrel, but think of poor me!" here interposes Maggie Sanderson, who is walking between the other two, and who, acting as buffer in more senses than one, usually manages to keep the peace between them.

"Yes, poor child?" responds Constance, tenderly, "it is terrible to think you will have to travel all the way to India alone, or only under the care of the captain of the ship. I don't think I should have the courage to do it!"

"I wouldn't take such a journey alone for the best man that ever breathed!" exclaims Edith Culver with a snort of contempt. "I call it *infra dig*, I call it lowering to your pride as a woman, to go out to marry a man, who could, if he liked, come home to marry you!"

"He could not come for a couple of years," protests Maggie, mildly, "and then we should have to go back again almost directly, and the journey is an expensive one, so my aunts think with me, that it is better that I should go out to him. Still, I confess that I don't like the prospect."

Edith Culver lifts her shoulders with an expressive gesture, but maintains silence, while Constance hastens to say,—

"Everything looks worse from a distance than it is in reality, Maggie. I daresay that when you are on board ship you will quite enjoy the voyage; and then, think of the delight of meeting your betrothed at the end of the journey, and of knowing that all uncertainty as to your future position in life is at an end."

"Yes, there is a good deal in that," responds Maggie, gently.

"A great deal I should say," continues Constance, warming with her subject. "Here you are settled in life, sure to get married, while Edith and I may live and die old maids like—like Miss Mary and Miss Caroline Barlow."

"No, never!" cries Edith, with energy. "I never could be like her!"

Her companions glance ahead at this speech, and perceive Miss Mary, the eldest of the two maiden ladies, but not the principal of the school, advancing towards them.

Is it any recommendation to a woman to say she is thoroughly good at heart, despite the fact that her temper and behaviour are as sour and crabbed and generally aggravating as they can possibly be?

Miss Barlow's pupils would promptly have decided in the negative, and would have voted that Miss Mary should be less good at heart, and more generally amiable and genial; less prone to irritate everybody about her on the slightest provocation, or without any provocation at all.

"Here, girls," she cries, approaching the three who will soon be beyond her control, "you shouldn't walk on the grass. You'll take cold."

"There hasn't been any rain for a fortnight, Miss Mary," replies Edith Culver, pertly.

"I didn't say there had, did I?" retorts Miss Mary, sharply. "But there has been dew, hasn't there? Have you done much of your packing, Miss Carew?"

"No," replies Constance, calmly. "I am waiting for three gowns from N. & M."

Blonde. She promised to send them this morning, and I want to go shopping to-day or to-morrow. There are several things I wish to buy before I leave town."

"I am going to Westbourne-grove this afternoon," remarks Miss Mary.

She always likes one of the rich girls to go with her, knowing, from experience, that she is pretty sure to come in for a handsome present.

But Constance is not fond of Miss Mary, and she replies, calmly,—

"Yes, I don't care for Westbourne-grove, and I am waiting for the dresses Madame is to send me before quite deciding what I will buy."

Then, as Miss Mary shows no inclination to leave them, Constance turns to the gravelled path with her two companions, and, there being only room for three, Miss Mary cannot walk by their side.

It is one of her charming peculiarities to object to see two or three people talking together without at once wishing to make a third or a fourth.

No matter if the couple are her sister and a friend, her cousins, or two of the pupils, Miss Mary is sure to come and join the group; and as she invariably resents the manner in which the conversation halts or the subject is changed when she comes to take part in it, the girls have unanimously adopted the practice of calling her "Paul Pry."

She lingers now a few minutes, but the three grown-up girls walk on, seeming to take no further heed of her presence, and slowly and reluctantly she turns and retraces her steps to the house.

The sensation that they are emancipated, that they have passed out of her control, is an unpleasant one; but there it is, the examinations are over, some of the pupils will leave to-day, others go to-morrow; Miss Carew starts home to Devonshire on the following day; while Edith Culver remains as a boarder for a fortnight, then goes off to the situation which has been found for her.

In any case, the girls are no longer under Miss Mary's thumb; and from the manner in which they ignore her presence, they quietly make her feel it.

Half-an-hour passes. Miss Mary walks through the long garden with her nose in the air, even her little niece, Mira, having declined to accompany her to town. Scarcely has she started for town, however, than the dress-maker's assistant arrives with the new gowns for Miss Carew. Most of the girls get their new dresses when they reach home, but Constance Carew is motherless. Her position also is unlike that of any of her companions.

She is an heiress, and, even during her minority, has a liberal income. Her father is a man of position; she is going home to take the management of his house; she will go into such society as the neighbourhood affords, and she is taking home with her a sufficient amount of finery to last through the coming winter.

The business of admiring the new gowns and trying them on is a long one. Margaret Sanderson's admiration is outspoken, but she can afford to be generous in expression, for some of the dresses in her *trousseau* are being made by Madame Blonde, and she can judge from these how her own will be turned out.

Edith Culver looks on, makes a few satirical remarks about fine feathers and fine birds; but it is very evident, from her expression, that she, also, has a feminine weakness for finery.

The dresses certainly are pretty. There is a white silk, elegantly made, for a ball or some equally important event; there is a salmon pink sura silk and a walking costume for winter wear, made of dark cloth and trimmed with rich fur.

"I shall want gloves, and shoes, and a fan to match," Constance remarks, thoughtfully, "and I should like to order a hat to be sent down to me to suit this winter costume."

Wouldn't it be jolly if we three could go to Regent street shopping?"

"Delightful!" is the simultaneous reply.

"But we can't!" adds Margaret Sanderson, shaking her head. "We are still supposed to be under Miss Barlow's care, and she wouldn't trust us to go anywhere out of her sight without one of the governesses, or one of her own family to look after us."

"We could take little Myra with us," remarks Constance. "She is the least objectionable."

"A deceitful little cat!" exclaims Edith Culver, angrily. "She'll be like butter and sugar to your face, if she thinks she can get anything out of you; and she will tell a lie and brazen it out unflinchingly, if she thinks she will best serve herself by doing so! Little sneak, I hate her!"

"She is very young," expostulates Constance; "she is dependent and poor. I often make excuses for her in my own mind," she continues, pitifully. "she is practically deserted by her parents; she lives here on the grudging charity of distant cousins, calling them her aunts. She has no money, no clothes, no amusements, except what are given to her; how is it possible for a girl brought up like this to have any sterling moral character, any sense of independence, or any regard for the truth? Her one idea is to curry favour with those from whom she can get most, and, as I said, one can scarcely wonder at it!"

"You yourself admit that she is a despicable character!" cries Edith, quickly.

"No; I say she is a pitiable one," is the answer. "But I leave it to you girls: shall we volunteer to take Myra with us, or ask Miss Caroline to come herself or send one of the governesses?"

"Oh, Myra is the least evil!" exclaims Margaret Sanderson, promptly. "She can make herself agreeable if she likes. I don't mind being paired off with her part of the way; but we ought to start at once if we are going this afternoon."

"Just my idea," responds Constance. "If we go, we must go at once, and we will have tea at a confectioner's. You girls get ready while I go and ask Miss Caroline."

Margaret and Edith at once make their way to the large room upstairs, which they share with two other girls, for Constance, in consideration of higher terms, has a room to herself. A tiny apartment it is true, overlooking the long garden, so small that you could not swing a cat in it, were you so cruelly inclined; but she has it all to herself, it is one nook in the world to which she can retire; and perhaps because she is the only pupil who has this privilege, she values it accordingly.

She glances around now with the feeling that she and this pretty little room will soon part company for good and all; then, closing the door behind her, she goes to seek Miss Caroline Barlow, the youngest of the two maiden sisters; but the principal of the school.

Miss Caroline is a contrast to her sister; she is taller, plumper, and, though there is only two years difference between them, she looks ten years younger.

There is nothing of the acidulated old maid about Miss Caroline; perhaps the romance that filled her life, and that only died out of it a few years ago, saved her from becoming sour and crabbed. In any case, she is amiable in temper, gracious in manner; and though she can, if necessary, be severe the most timid girl in the school is not afraid of her.

She smiles pleasantly when Constance Carew enters the room where she is writing, and prefers her request, but she answers, dubiously,—

"You may go, certainly, if I can spare any of the governesses to accompany you!"

"We thought Myra might like to go with us," remarks Constance, "not that she is any protection," she adds, with a smile, "but I

think we are all three old enough to take care of ourselves."

"Yes, no doubt you are, but take Myra with you, it will be best, and don't be longer than is necessary, Miss Carew!"

"Thank you, of course not!" is the reply, and in a very short time after this the four girls are on their way to Oxford Street.

Myra Barlow is a bold forward little mix of sixteen, always trying to attach herself to the elder girls, partly for what she can get out of them in the way of bribes and presents, partly also with a view of worming herself into their secrets if they have any.

She is short and slender, has dark eyes, dark hair, a sallow complexion, hollow cheeks, and a long square chin.

When she is amiably and pleasantly excited, she is almost pretty; when she is ill-tempered and sulky—as she frequently is—she is almost ugly.

Her voice is low, whining and affected. Her manners are quiet, and yet she will say the most fast and impudent things, and do the most outrageous actions, with an unblushing audacity which it would be difficult to equal.

To-day, she is in high spirits, though she does not say much; but she attaches herself to the side of Constance Carew, and will not leave it until they enter the omnibus.

When they alight at the corner of Tottenham Court Road, however, Constance and Edith Culver walk on ahead, and Myra is obliged to keep by Margaret Sanderson.

They enter several shops, make many purchases, and Myra, after her usual custom, asks the price of various articles, and then sighs and remarks, *sotto voce*—

"I should so much like that, but I haven't any money!"

A proceeding which brings with it a certain amount of success, Constance having made up her mind before she started, that she would have to spend at least five shillings upon the grasping greedy little thing.

They have completed their purchases, have had tea at a confectioner's, and are looking in the window of a big bonnet shop, preparatory to taking the omnibus on their way home, when Myra, who is rather behind the others, exclaims in her usually affected tone,—

"Mr. Balderson, you here! We all thought you had gone out of town."

The person she thus stops in his rapid pace is a young man of seven or eight-and-twenty, with a refined thoughtful countenance, piercing blue eyes, a long moustache, but otherwise cleanly shaven, wearing a broad-brimmed, soft felt hat, a loosely-knotted tie, and a velvet coat; his whole costume and appearance denoting him to be an artist.

"I am going out of town to-morrow or the day afterwards," he replies, taking her hand; "but how do you come to be here, alone?"

"I am not alone," replies Myra, with a smile, as her companions turn and shake hands with the artist, who is well known to them.

He is a friend of the two Miss Barlows. He visits the house frequently, and, though he does not teach drawing in the school, he is always ready to help the girls with a suggestion with regard to their artistic work.

Myra, who has eyes for everything, observes, with a spice of malice, that the colour of Edith Culver's cheeks deepens and her eyes become more bright when Mr. Balderson appears among them, while he is palpably very much more interested in Constance Carew than in her.

"Wise man, has an eye for the main chance," mutters the girl, cynically. "Besides, she is the best-looking of the lot; and as he'll be too old for me by the time I grow up, I don't mind if he marries her."

In pursuance of this magnanimous conclusion, she asks, carelessly,—

"Are you on your way home, Mr. Balderson?"

He replies in the affirmative, and Myra adds,—

"So are we. So we can all walk on together, as we go the same way."

Then she attaches herself to the side of Edith Culver, while the artist and the two other girls walk on in front.

Soraps of conversation from those a-head come back to them now and again, and they hear Mr. Balderson say,—

"I am going down to Cornwall to sketch a particular rock for a picture I am painting."

"Where is the rock?" asks Constance.

"Near the Land's End," is the reply.

"When I have done it, I shall walk back through Cornwall and Devon."

A break in the conversation here occurs; then they hear Constance say,—

"Yes, I live at Telgumouth; you must call and show papa some of your sketches, Mr. Balderson."

"Yes, and make love to his daughter," Myra whispers in Edith's ear. "Can't you imagine them walking by the sea-shore, talking art and love all in the same breath, Miss Culver?"

"No, you little viper! She cares no more for him than she cares for you!" is the passionate retort, which provokes Myra to say,—

"Whether she cares for him or not, he is in love with her, as he never will be with you, Miss Plainface."

Then the two relapse into a sulky silence, which is not broken until they reach Danborough House, whither Mr. Balderson accompanies them.

CHAPTER II.

COMING HOME.

THE train timed to leave Paddington station at one P.M. for the west of England is about to start.

Two or three minutes ago the bell was rung, and the passengers, whose friends have come to see them off, are waving their last adieu, when two ladies run hurriedly upon the platform, followed by a couple of porters laden with luggage.

One of these ladies is young, tall, and elegant in her dress and carriage; the other is more than middle-aged, thin, spare, and severe-looking; and any of the pupils at Danborough House, Hampstead, would instantly recognise the first as Constance Carew, and the second as Miss Mary Barlow, who has come to see her charge into the train that is to take her home to Devonshire.

It is usually Miss Mary's duty to see the girls off to their respective homes, and she prides herself upon knowing what the exact fare of the cabman ought to be, how long he should take on a journey, and the precise hour at which a train will start.

"Just in time!" gasps Miss Mary, breathlessly. "It was all the fault of that cabman. Yes, porter, first-class; jump in, dear, take care of yourself. Oh, no, this won't do!"

"Can't change now, ma'am, time's up!" sounds in Miss Mary's ears simultaneously with the closing of the carriage door, and she steps back, and stands with an expression of dismay on her countenance as the girl, who was in her charge, waves her hand to her, and the train rolls out of the station.

"To think that a man should be in the carriage alone with her!" groans Miss Barlow, in genuine distress; "and I meant to have asked the guard to look after her. Oh, dear! oh, dear! it was all the fault of that cabman. I had counted to be a good half hour earlier!"

Meanwhile, Constance Carew, having given the last wave of the hand to Miss Barlow, turns round to ascertain the cause of that lady's disapproval, and perceives a gentleman seated in the farther corner of the carriage, but on the same side as herself.

A faint smile crosses her lips as she remem-

bers Miss Barlow's consternation, while she muses to herself,—

"He seems harmless enough, though I would rather have been quite alone; but no doubt other people will get into the carriage at the next station."

Then she opens a book which she has brought with her to read on the journey, and tries to give all her attention to its contents.

The gentleman in the far corner of the carriage eyes her curiously, though he seems to be engrossed in the perusal of his newspaper.

He also would prefer to be alone, but he does not give any sign of this desire, nor does he attempt to converse with his companion; for he quite understood the expression of alarm uttered by the lady who saw her into the carriage, and he smiles bitterly at the thought of anybody in the wide world being afraid of him.

Onward speeds the train at the rate of fifty miles an hour; past towns and hamlets, past valleys and hills, dashing through stations with a prolonged shrill whistle, pulling up for nothing until it comes within a few miles of the city of Bath, when its speed sensibly slackens, and the engine at last comes to a standstill.

There has been silence between the two occupants of this first-class compartment all this time.

Constance Carew has divided her attention between her book and the landscape, the former of which she has found most uninteresting.

Curiosity has made her glance several times in the direction of the corner in which her silent companion sits; but she can see very little of his face, which is either turned towards the window at his own end of the carriage, or hidden by the projecting cushion which divides the seats in the first-class compartments.

Evidently he has no curiosity with regard to her, his thoughts are wrapped up in himself, and he gives a perceptible start when, as the train pulls up at Bath, Constance looks towards him and asks,—

"Can you tell me how long we stop here?"

"Only a few minutes I think," he answers, and then takes no further notice of her, while she, parched with thirst and with a splitting headache, which she thinks a cup of tea would drive away, does not dare to leave the carriage to go to the refreshment room.

Soon the train goes on again at express speed, and Constance leans back in her corner pale and heavy eyed; the rapid motion of the train making the pain in her head almost intolerable.

I have already said that she is tall and elegant. I may now add that she is just sixteen, that she has bright golden-brown hair, dark blue eyes, so dark that they seem almost as black as the eyelashes which fringe them; a Grecian nose, a chin too square and firm for absolute beauty; and lips that are ripe and red and pouting as a rule, though now, like her smooth cheeks, they are many degrees paler than usual.

In the hurry of leaving the city which had brought them so late to Paddington, Constance had forgotten the little bag containing sandwiches and milk, which was to take the place of her mid-day dinner; the consequence is, she has had nothing to eat or to drink since breakfast, and this helps to increase her headache so much, that when the train stops at Exeter, a little after five o'clock, she steps out of the carriage, resolved at any cost to get a glass of milk or a cup of tea.

But the tea which she does get makes her feel worse, and she hurries out of the refreshment room on to the platform, just in time to see a gentleman whom she knows well step into the very carriage in which she has travelled from London.

Never so long as she lives will Constance Carew be able clearly to say why she did not follow him.

She has left her book in the carriage, but,

the weather being warm, she has no wraps. She cares nothing for her book, however, and she has the wretched feeling of looking her very worst—a very good reason, if reason had to be given, for avoiding a long half-hour's ride with Sir Wilfred Marshall, her sometime admirer, and her father's friend and neighbour.

A sudden shyness has come over her, mingled with a desire to be alone in her pain, to be spared the necessity of having to talk; and acting on the impulse of the moment, she steps into the carriage immediately in the rear of the one in which she had made the first part of the journey.

"I am quite alone here," she thinks, with a sigh of relief, and she rests her feet on the cushions and tries to overcome the feeling of sickness that is upon her.

The train quickly passes St. Thomas's, gets on to Starcross, and now the river is well in view and becomes wider, and she knows that very soon she will be close to the sea.

Being alone, she can have both of the windows wide open, and the cool fresh air blowing through the carriage revives her, the pain in her head becomes less acute, the feeling of sickness departs, and, as they pass the Warren at the mouth of the Exe and the train runs now by the side of the shore, she rouses herself to look out on the coast, which loses half of its beauty in the gathering twilight.

Though she cannot distinguish the colour of the dark red cliffs, she feels that she is looking on the familiar faces of old friends as she observes their outline against the darkening sky.

How lovely the sea is! the white-crested waves rolling in with such a thundering sound and breaking in foam against the seawall, dashing the spray even in at the carriage window; but she is roused from her reverie by the train stopping at Dawlish, and she removes her feet from the cushions and takes her seat in the corner by the window nearest the platform.

The door of the carriage in advance of her, the one in which she travelled as far as Exeter, does not open, and Constance therefore concludes that Sir Wilfred Marshall and his taciturn companion are going farther.

"Sir Wilfred will be sure to get out at Teignmouth, and then I shall not mind speaking to him," she thinks, with an unconscious smile, while a soft blush flushes her cheek. "My head is better now, but when I was at Exeter the pain was intolerable."

By this time the passengers for Dawlish with their luggage have alighted, and at this hour of the day there are very few going on to Teignmouth.

When the train moves, glancing inland, she catches a glimpse of the Dawlish Water falling in little cascades as it flows through the Lawn to the sea, with Lanscombe Park far in the background and Heldon standing like a ridge black against the sky; and then all disappears, and they enter the first of the three short tunnels out through the projecting headlands which lie between Dawlish and Teignmouth.

One glimpse of a troubled sea breaking angrily over huge water-frosted rocks, and then the train enters the second tunnel, and Constance becomes conscious that something like a struggle is taking place in the next compartment—a struggle between Sir Wilfred Marshall and the pale-faced man who had answered her question so briefly when she spoke to him at Bath.

In the "whuzz, whuzz" of the train she cannot distinguish the words they say; but the carriage door is opened, slammed, opened again, and then something or someone is shot out of the open door upon the line.

She does not hear the carriage door shut again, and probably she would not have heard or seen what she has done, if she had not been interested in at least one of the occupants of the compartment before her.

Constance Carew's blood runs cold as she

realises that murder has probably been committed, and that either the murderer or the victim is the man whom—yes, at this awful moment the revelation comes to herself, and shows her the but half suspected secret of her own heart—the man whom she loves.

In an agony of horror, as the train comes out of this tunnel to almost immediately enter the next, she looks out of the window, and sees that the door of the next compartment, which she believed she had heard opened twice, is closed.

This sight makes her sink back into her seat, trembling with fear and with a vague horror; for surely the man who had cast his companion out of the carriage must be a maniac!

"It could not have been Sir Wilfred who did it!" she moans, wringing her hands in agony; "he is kind and gentle, and would suffer pain rather than inflict it, and the other man must have been mad. I remember how white his face was, and how strange and wild his eyes looked. Oh! to think that I came through that dreadful Box tunnel with him, to think that he might have murdered me, as he has—"

She breaks down at this, and weeps, and wrings her hands at the thought that the handsome man, the courteous gentleman, who had paid her so much quiet attention when she was last home from school, and whom she had hoped to see frequently now she has left school altogether, is lying in the tunnel they have left behind them, probably too much hurt by his fall to escape from his perilous position before the next train comes over the same spot and crushes him.

"What ought she to do?"

That is the question which agitates her mind.

Ought she not to speak to the station-master at once, and to insist upon having the lunatic arrested before he can escape, while help is sent to his victim?

Unaccustomed to act for herself, Constance has come slowly to the conclusion that this is plainly her duty, when the train pulls up at Teignmouth railway station, and, before they have actually stopped, she sees Sir Wilfred Marshall spring out of the carriage next to her, and hasten away.

Her heart ceases to beat, the sight for the moment paralyses her.

Can her senses have deceived her? Was there no coffin in the tunnel, no throwing out of some heavy body from the next carriage?

She almost thinks she has imagined it all. At any rate she will see. If that pale-faced, wild-looking man is still in the compartment, she can but conclude that she had fallen asleep and dreamed the horrible scene.

The book she left behind will be an excuse for opening the carriage door, and she steps out upon the platform and carries her design into execution.

But the carriage is empty of living occupants, and her heart swims, a film comes over her eyes.

She forgets her book which lies there as she left it, but rests her hand upon the cushioned seat to steady herself; and then her horror finds expression in a low cry, for she has placed her neglected hand in a pool of blood!

Half in terror, half impelled by a desire to save the man of whom she has for the last few minutes been thinking so tenderly, she closes the carriage door with a slam, leaving her book behind, then hurries into the waiting-room, which at the moment she finds empty.

Once here, she wipes the blood off her hand with her handkerchief, pulls on her glove, and, pursued with a feeling which she tries hard to conquer, she returns to the platform, to find that the train has gone on to Newton Abbot, and her boxes are here waiting to be reclaimed.

She glances around, expecting to see her father, but he is not here, neither has he sent anybody else to meet her; and she tells a



[“OH, HOW BAD YOU DO LOOK, DEARIE!” CRIES OLD JENIFER TO CONSTANCE.]

porter to take her luggage to a fly, of which there are always plenty in the station yard; then she steps into the carriage herself, giving the direction, Kilworthy House.

At any other time Constance would have felt hurt at her father's neglect, in neither coming himself nor sending a servant to meet her; but now she is relieved to be alone, it gives her time to collect her thoughts, to calm her mind, and to try to decide upon the course she ought to pursue with regard to the tragedy, of which she has in such a strange manner been the witness.

“I cannot accuse Sir Wilfred, no, I cannot,” she mutters to herself, as she rides along, “besides, it is too late,” she adds, in a tone of relief. “And after all,” she continues, “the man probably attacked him first, and he may have hurried away like that just to go and see if he were hurt with his fall, and I can do nothing now. I ought to have given the alarm at once, if I meant to give it at all.”

So she argues with herself, and yet there is a weak small voice in her heart, the voice of conscience, which will not be altogether smothered, a voice that tells her she is only a degree less guilty than the murderer, if she thus shields him by her silence. Like most weak things, this voice tries to make itself felt by its constant reiteration, and she, protesting against it, tries to reassure herself with the thought,—

“The man may not be dead, may not be very much injured; and those tunnels are so short that I have seen people walking through them on a Sunday when I have been on the parade at Dawlish. No, there were many chances in his favour. It is absurd to suppose that he is dead, and yet, that pool of blood on the seat! Oh! something dreadful has happened, I am convinced, and I—I am too great a coward to denounce Sir Wilfred; besides, I am sure that he could not have meant to do it, quite sure, and yet—”

She shudders, a deadly sickness comes over her, and she feels so faint and ill that she has to be helped out of the carriage which now pulls up at her father's door.

“Oh, how bad you do look, dearie!” cries old Jenifer, who nursed her in her infancy, and who regards her now with a love only second in devotion to that of a mother.

“Yes, I have had a sick headache ever since I left London,” responds Constance, “and it is as bad now as it can be. But where is papa? He always comes to meet me!”

“Yes, dearie, but your father's not himself lately, he's gone to spend the evening with Mrs. Treleven; he's always there now, but he's left a note for you, and, from what he said when he went away, I think he expects you'll follow him.”

Constance tears open the note, and an expression of mortification passes over her white face as she reads its contents; then she closes it, thrusts it into her pocket, and says wearily,—

“Yes, you were right. He wants me to follow him; but it is impossible, I feel too ill. I shall go to bed now; but I have eaten nothing since breakfast, Jenifer. Tell cook to send me a cup of tea to my room, will you?”

“Leave it to me, dearie! I'll bring something that will do you good!” is the answer. “But let me help you to take off your things; you're quite right to go to bed!”

And she half leads, half supports, the nearly fainting girl to her own room, and does not leave her until she is safely in bed, when she goes to fetch the wing of a chicken, and a tumbler of soda water; but Constance cannot eat, though she tries to do so.

Mind and body are both overtaxed. The first, with horror of the tragedy she has witnessed, and terror at the conviction that she is doing wrong by maintaining silence

about it; the second, with unusual fatigue and the lack of her accustomed food.

So completely prostrated is she from these causes, that she closes her eyes, lays her head on her pillow, and soon falls into a restless troubled sleep.

“She don't seem to think nothing of Mrs. Treleven,” mutters old Jenifer. “Poor dear, she don't know the troubles that are in store for her; she'll find it a sad change when a stepmother is brought home, and such a woman, with two grown-up daughters and a son, and all of them as masterful as may be. Poor dearie, poor dearie!”

The old woman's lament has died away, there is silence in the room, broken at length by the sleeper flinging her right hand on the bed, with a shudder, and crying, in a low, agonised tone,—

“Blood! there is blood upon it!”

“Where, dearie? Where?” asks Jenifer, soothingly.

“There! Don't you see? There!” cries the sleeper.

She springs into a sitting posture as she speaks, and extends her trembling hands; and Jenifer, looking in the direction indicated, sees Captain Carew standing in the doorway!

(To be continued.)

THE hideous bustle had its origin in a Paris theatre. In an extravaganza, two pretty actresses played the parts of princesses whom an old witch had metamorphosed into a pair of Turkeys. When retransformed into their original forms they retained some of the turkey nature, which most showed itself in their bustles. So prettily droll were the costumes that the immediate consequence was a struggle between the tailor-made style of corset and the *bien truffee tournure*. Both were given fair trials, and after a long fight the large and eccentric bustle conquered.



[GUY SPRANG FROM HIS HORSE AND JOINED VINNIE AT THE GATE.]

NOVELETTE.]

HER GIRLHOOD'S HERO.

CHAPTER I.

"On, Miss Caxton, if only you knew how hateful it all is, you wouldn't wonder I speak as I do. I wish I could run away, I wish something—anything would happen; I wish I were dead and buried—no, I don't, because then poor papa would be more lonely than before. Oh! she's just hateful with her dirty, whining ways."

"My dear," remonstrated the gentle old maid, "you are talking of your stepmother!"

"Of course I am. She's the cause of all our trouble, and naturally I hate her!"

"This is wicked, Vinnie!"

"I know it is, but I don't care. I am wicked, I suppose, but," with a little quiver in her young voice, "I was not always like that. Mamma has spoiled me all."

"Come and sit down by me, Vinnie dear," said Miss Caxton; "we must talk this over together. I can't have my little favourite behaving and speaking like a fretful child. Here is your low stool. Now give me your hand, dear, and whilst I talk, try to think that, in all I say, I am seeking your good. By the way, have you not rather neglected your dress of late? I can count two pins where only hooks should be?"

The pretty childish face flushed crimson.

"Miss Caxton, there is no encouragement to be tidy. You never saw such an awful home as ours is; and mamma doesn't care how we look. Why, she's the untidiest of us all."

"Two wrongs will never make a right, Vinnie, and I would rather leave Mrs. Orme out of our conversation. I know what your own mother's wishes concerning you would be, and I am going to tell them to you. I am

very much afraid you have been forgetting them of late. Let me see, Vinnie, how old are you?"

"Sixteen next Monday. It is four years since mamma died."

"But you have not forgotten how pretty she made your home; what a busy little woman she was, and how careful that you all should go daintily clad? I've been thinking, Vinnie dear, that you might do much to help your brothers and sisters, and to make your father's life brighter. Where there are so many children there must always be a deal of mending."

"The children have no clothes worth mending," gloomily.

"Oh, things can't be quite so bad as that, dear; and then you might keep one room at least fit for your father to rest in after his hard day's work."

"There is no encouragement to do so. Mamma would fill it at once with her trashy novels, and half dirty clothes. She goes from room to room until each one is as bad as that she has just vacated."

"My dear, I won't hear another word about Mrs. Orme. I feel I ought not to listen to these complainings. After all she is your father's wife, and as such entitled to respect from you; and you are old enough now to see the evils of indolence and procreantation. I hope, dear, that I may find a marked change in your appearance and manner before many days are over; and now, as I don't like scolding you, I will change the subject, and give you some pleasant news. Mr. Guy Ullathorne is home."

Vinnie's face brightened a moment, then resumed its former discontented expression.

"That will make no difference to us. He will not care to know us now. It is two years since he was here, and things were bad enough then, but they were heavenly compared with the present state of affairs."

"Guy is not likely to forget old friends,"

said Miss Caxton, gravely; "and one other little piece of news I have for you. You have seen the beautiful young lady who lives at The Holt?"

"Yes. She is Miss Dolane, and I don't like her; she only thinks of her beauty and her clothes."

"I hope not, for Guy is engaged to her, and I should be most grieved if his marriage proved unhappy. I have always made a hero of Guy, and I have so much for which to be grateful to him. Did I ever tell you, Vinnie, that it is owing to his generosity I now live at ease? After his sister died (I was her governess you know) he found me out, and I was in very poor circumstances. It was he who purchased my annuity and this dear little home of mine. There are times when I feel I would die to ensure his happiness," and the little old maid's eyes filled with tears.

"I hope he will be happy," said Vinnie Orme, softly. "I hope she will be good to him. And now, dear Miss Caxton, I must go. It is getting near tea time, and—don't think I will forget your words—I won't—I'll try to remember every one of them, and—and act up to them."

"I can trust you, dear. Good-bye, and come again soon."

She stood by the window, watching whilst the young girl hurried down the pathway to the road.

She was a very young thing, not quite sixteen yet; slight and supple, with a pale face giving already a promise of refined beauty, great grey eyes fringed by long, black lashes—wonderful eyes they were, deep and dark—and the face itself was framed in curly masses of warm bronze brown hair.

Not even the shabby, ill fitting dress could disguise the grace of the like young form. It had been brown once, but was now of a non-descript shade, and extremely short in the skirt, displaying a liberal amount of leg. The body was too tight, too short in the waist and

sleeve, and not by any means in a tidy condition.

Miss Caxton sighed as she watched Vinnie walking swiftly homewards. She remembered how different life was to her once—only four years ago.

It was then her mother, a beautiful woman, who had made her husband's happiness, died, leaving six children, Vinnie the eldest was twelve, while the baby numbered only so many hours.

Poor Dr. Orme! he was distracted, and what to do with all his babies he did not know. For their sakes he married again at the close of the first year. Unluckily he chose a certain Miss Forsyth, a lady whose juvenility was open to doubt; whose tastes were of the most extravagant kind.

Before the honeymoon waned he found himself called upon to discharge the debts she had incurred in preparing her trousseau; and Miss Forsyth, who had fully believed the doctor's income to be at least nearly a thousand a year, discovered, to her chagrin, it was something under four hundred.

She had no housewifely instincts, and the servants, knowing this, did just as much as they pleased and no more.

The management was of the very worst, and soon the unfortunate doctor was compelled to part with his pony and trap; then the cook was dismissed, next the housemaid went, and only an incompetent "general" was engaged to supply their places.

Then Mrs. Orme discovered she was an invalid, and would lie weak in and weak out upon a couch, in a dirty dressing-gown, reading such novels as suited her intellectual capacity.

So things went from bad to worse, and it was a miracle, to all who knew them, that the young Ormes grew up so strong and healthy. As for the doctor, he was an old man long before his time, and it was with a shuddering sense of sickness he would return home after his hard day's work.

There were the children dirty and forlorn-looking, and there was his wife ready to meet him with querulous complainings, and laments over her own ill-fortune.

What wonder if he was fast becoming sour in disposition, or that Vinnie should so revolt against a state of affairs she was helpless to alter.

She gave one quick, disgusted glance at the house as she entered the gate. It was really a handsome as well as a substantial building; but the doors and shutters were almost devoid of paint, but not devoid of dust and mud splashes; the windows had forgotten they ever had acquaintance with a duster; the curtains were faded, and hung in every fashion but the correct one; in fact, the whole place was miserably dirty and uncomfortable.

"Oh, dear! how ashamed I am of it all," thought the girl, as she made her way to the keeping-room where, as usual, Mrs. Orme was resting.

"How long you have been," she said, querulously. "You never seem to remember my need of society. I am really thankful I am not so selfish as you, Vinnie!"

The girl made no reply, only she set her lips in a little hard line, and, tossing her hat into a corner, began to sweep a collection of odds and ends from the table into a basket.

"Don't forget," remarked Mrs. Orme, languidly; "you should learn to speak and move quietly as befits a lady!"

"I look like a lady, don't I?" the girl questioned, with a short laugh. "I sometimes think it's all a mistake that I was born one. Well, I'll be as quiet as I can, but I am going to get father's tea ready."

Mrs. Orme condescended to smile.

"You've been listening to Miss Caxton's bonhomies, and have come home ultra-industrious and dutiful. But I question if you know how to brew a cup of tea, and we can't afford to waste anything over your experiments!"

Vinnie said nothing, but went on with her

self-imposed task, spreading the not too clean cloth, and cutting bread-and-butter. Then she went to the kitchen; the kettle was singing away merrily, and Vinnie, whose knowledge of such things was of the slightest, concluded everything was as it should be, and made her tea.

Presently the doctor came in, more tired and depressed than usual, and Vinnie, with a proud sense of her own importance, said,—"Tea is quite ready, papa. I thought you might need it, so I prepared it myself."

He looked pleased, and, taking his seat, waited whilst the girl began to pour out an almost colourless liquid.

"I can't understand why it is so pale," she said, eyeing it doubtfully. "I am quite sure I put in a sufficient quantity of tea!"

"Did the water boil? Of course it did not. Take away the rubbish, and, as I am due at Fordham in half-an-hour, I must go without refreshment. This house is like no other; and if you can't do better, I would advise you not to meddle with household matters!"

Then he went angrily out, and poor Vinnie, covered with shame and confusion, was tempted to break down utterly.

"I told you to let well alone," drawled Mrs. Orme, with a little malicious smile. "Perhaps another time you will take my advice."

"I was so anxious to help. Mamma, can't you teach me how to be useful?"

The lady lifted her brows.

"I was bred as a lady, not a domestic or a mother's help," she said, rigidly. "You had better go for instruction to Miss Caxton," and she turned again to her novel; whilst Vinnie, with a heart too full for further speech, went out into the garden, and, leaning upon the gate, gave herself up to very bitter and resentful thoughts.

She was startled by the sound of horses' hoofs upon the road, and, looking quickly up, saw a lady and gentleman approaching. The lady, who was young and beautiful, turned one careless disdainful glance upon the girl and rode by, heedless of her companion's "Stop, Belle—just a moment;" then he sprang from his horse and joined Vinnie by the gate.

"My dear girl, how pleased I am to see you—and how you have grown! What, Vinnie, haven't you a word of welcome for me?"

"Yes," flashing rosy, "I am very glad to see you, Guy—Mr. Ulshorne."

"Let it stand 'Guy,' if you please. It would be odd if we—you and I—indulged in ceremony. How is the doctor, and are all the little ones well? Do you think they will remember me? I mean to put them to the test. I shall come in to-morrow."

"Oh, don't please don't!" the girl cried, distressfully. "I should be ready to die of mortification if you did. It is all so dreadful, and you are used to having everything pretty and bright about you. I couldn't bear you to see us as we are, Guy," and there were tears glittering on the long lashes.

"Poor little Vinnie! And do you think I shall lay the blame of the discomfort upon yours or your father's shoulders? I promise to be blind to all you wish hidden; but I can't and won't promise to ignore my old friends. When I was a motherless boy your mother was my best friend, and I never can forget her kindness."

"You will not bring Miss Dolans?" entreatingly.

"Not unless you wish it," he answered, quietly.

He had a shrewd suspicion that his beautiful fiancée would decidedly object to know the Ormes. They were not society people, and could offer her no return for her friendship.

"Miss Dolans is waiting you at the bend of the road," said Vinnie, presently. "Do not let me keep you."

"Well, I shall see you to-morrow. Good-bye, dear," and vaulting lightly into his saddle he rode off, as comely a young Englishman as one would desire to see—broad-

shouldered, tall, with well-set-up head, brown-haired, brown-eyed, with a frank, pleasant face that had a latent strength about it and a capacity for great passion.

Miss Dolans greeted him a little impatiently.

"Why did you stay to talk with that girl, Guy?"

"Because she is a very old friend. I have known her from her birth; and the first Mrs. Orme (her mother) was most good to me."

"You will hardly expect me to call upon them? They look a most disreputable lot, and the house is simply awful."

"You will please yourself, Belle. But I should have been glad to know you and poor little Vinnie were friends."

The young lady shrugged her handsome shoulders.

"My dear Guy, I associate with my equals only—the girl is impossible."

He made no reply. He knew that all arguments would fail with her, and his face shadowed as they rode on in silence.

They had been engaged but three months, but whatever glamour might once have rested over their betrothal had long since vanished.

He had never professed to love Miss Dolans violently—he had admired her beauty, for she was beautiful in a Titian-like style, and she had angled very successfully for him. He was rich and well-born; and when Miss Dolans looked at her mother's coarse tints, she decided it would be well to settle on her pink and white lost all charm in obesity and florid hues.

Guy never could tell quite how he was induced to propose. It was a lovely night, and he was alone with Belle Dolans in a dimly-lit conservatory. She was very lovely in robes of some floating pale blue stuff, and she was very kind.

When he woke in the morning he was not quite so satisfied with his engagement as on the previous evening. But he told himself Belle was very handsome and good-natured; that soon or late a fellow must marry, and no doubt he and she would be quite a model couple. "For it isn't in either of us to fall violently into love," he mused.

As he assisted her to alight at her own door he looked earnestly into her face through the gathering dusk. She was lovely with that flush upon her cheeks, that light in her blue eyes, and her hair lay in disordered golden masses about the white column-like throat.

Some new feeling stirred him. He vaguely wished he loved her more, and taking her hand in his, he said, earnestly,—

"Belle, I would like to feel you cared more for me than for any other fellow who hovers about you. Do you, dear?"

"Of course," withdrawing her hand. "Am not going to marry you?"

CHAPTER II.

In October Mrs. Orme fell really ill; at first so accustomed were all who knew her, to her groundless complainings, that very little heed was taken of her condition. But in a day or two the doctor began to look very grave; then he spoke of calling in a nurse, and Vinnie felt both alarmed and sorry for her stepmother. Little Miss Caxton, hearing the news, shut up her cottage and went to the doctor's.

"There is no occasion to bring in a nurse," she said, kindly. "I can do all that is necessary, and invalids do not often like to have strangers about them."

So she set to work to make the sick room presentable, giving no sign of the discomfort she suffered, through the squalor and untidiness of the ménage. But all her careful nursing, all the doctor's skill, could not avail to save Mrs. Orme; at the close of a fortnight she quietly passed away in her sleep, and oh! it was sad, there was no one left to regret her. The useless, selfish life was ended; and although not one of those who had known her

would confess so much, even to their hearts, with the fating of that querulous voice, a new sense of peace settled over the house.

They buried her close by Vinnie's mother, and the girl was shocked at her own callousness, because not one tear could she shed. The young children remained at home, glorying in the possession of new clothes—a rare and noteworthy occurrence with them in those days. Unloved she had lived, and unregretted Lucretia Orme died! Alas, alas! how sad it all was!

That evening, when the widower sat alone in his shabby study, Vinnie entered somewhat timidly; but remembering Miss Caxton's words, she went forward, and putting an arm about his neck, said unsteadily—

"Papa, I have been a very useless girl; I am a very ignorant one; but I want to learn how to make you comfortable. Miss Caxton will teach me the way; and" (here she dropped on her knees beside him) "you will not mind, at first, if I make dreadful blunders—oh, I know you won't, when you see how hard I shall try to do my duty;" and then, as the young sweet face, so like the dear one hidden beneath the dust of the grave, was lifted to his, he stooped, and kissed it gently.

"We will bear with one another," he said, gravely. "I sometimes think, Vinnie dear, I have not done my duty by you—you have had none of the advantages belonging to your position."

"I shall not miss them, never having had them," she answered, gently; "do not think of me now, papa. Oh, how cold you are; the evenings get so chilly! Wait, I will build you a fire—I am capable of that," and, waiting no reply, she hurried away for wood and paper which she brought back in the large apron she had donned. And presently the flames were leaping, and flashing, and brightening the room. Then Vinnie got out a bottle of port, a gift from Guy, and compelled her father to drink, watching with pleased eyes whilst the slow colour crept into his worn cheeks, and feeling with gentle hands how the warm blood was stirring in his.

"Now, you are rested dear," she said, "I want to talk to you; what I have to say will draw your mind away—away from this sorrow. Oh, papa, you would never guess how kind people have been to us—and Miss Caxton is dearest and best of all. She proposes that Nellie and Floss should go to her every morning for lessons; she will like the work, and it will make it easier for you to educate Roy and Clement."

"She is most good, and I am not too proud to raise any objection to so kind an offer. Ah, Vinnie, how shamefully you have been neglected."

"Do not mind me," the girl answered, quickly. "My good times are coming too. Miss Caxton is going to teach me how to be useful, so my mornings are to be spent at home; in the afternoon I am to resume my study of French and music with her; then I shall have the whole evening to devote to you."

"You are too young to be able to do all these things, child."

"I shall grow older every day, and I am very strong, and you will not forbid me to try."

"No; but I will not let you overtax your strength; you are such a mere child yet, Vinnie, I would like the children to come in to-night. I do not know them so well as I should."

That evening, although papa looked so grave, and sister Vinnie spoke in low tones, was not unhappy; and when the doctor bade them one and all look up to her and do their best to help her, all but "baby" May felt the appeal, and resolved to do their utmost for "papa" and Vinnie.

In the morning Miss Caxton came, for Nellie's lessons were not to begin for a week, and, with the two elder girls, made a tour through the house, teaching Vinnie many

things. That same day the doctor was summoned from home.

"I may be gone a week," he said. "You will not be afraid in my absence, child?"

"Oh, no; I shall have too much to do to remember to be nervous."

"You will want some money; this is all I can spare at present," placing five sovereigns in her hand, "make it go as far as you can; and don't on any account have credit."

And when he was gone Vinnie fairly executed a dance.

"Oh, Miss Caxton, we will make his study and the keeping-room so nice. I looked in the windows when we went over to Eardham the other week, and I saw some cheap wall-papers—so pretty and cool-looking. I do believe I could hang it myself, don't you—the rooms aren't high?"

"Suppose we try," answered the little old maid, delighted to have so apt a pupil. "Young Jimson would whitewash the ceiling for a mere nothing, and the doors only want a little scrubbing to make them decent. Then we must have all the carpets up, and curtains and chair-covers washed. We'll do our work thoroughly or not at all."

And oh! what a commotion there was the next day, and for days to follow. Every nook and corner was investigated and cleaned; the carpets beaten and mended, the curtains washed; and even if their colour was gone, that mattered little now that they were no longer soiled.

The first night Vinnie went to bed pleasantly tired; the second found her aching in every limb from the unaccustomed work; on the third she fainted, but she would not rest until all was done.

Then she viewed her work with satisfaction, taking especial pride in the keeping-room and study. A neat middle-aged maid supplied the place of the former slatternly girl, and everything was well in order when the doctor returned.

To say he was surprised is to very deeply express his admiration of the change Vinnie and her ally had wrought.

There was a very suspicious moisture in his eyes as he took his child into his arms and kissed her, with a love that amply repaid her for all her labours.

Of course, things were far from running smoothly yet. Vinnie had so much to learn, and her blunders were both numerous and grotesque; but, remembering his promise, the doctor was very forbearing, and his home was happier than it had been for four long years.

Then came Guy with his congratulations.

"Why, Vinnie, what wonders you have worked! How jolly the old place looks; what a little woman you are growing! But you are just a thought too pale, so get your wraps and come for a spin with me."

"But Miss Dolane?" objected Vinnie. "She'll be looking for you."

"No, Belle is entertaining some friends who are not my friends; she will not miss me. Where shall we go? To Druid's Mount?"

"Yes; it is ages since I went so far," and she ran off eagerly to secure her hat and jacket.

"Do you see," she said, as she walked briskly on beside him, "do you see how tall I am? My head nearly reaches your shoulders. The boys call me the maypole."

"Then, I can only say, they are very rude. I must talk to them."

She laughed.

"All the talking in the world would not make them polite to me. I am not old enough for them to fear me. Oh, Guy! how nice it is to have you back again! How horrid it will be when you leave us for good!"

"I've no intention of doing so. What put such an idea into your little head?"

"I don't know. I thought, perhaps, Miss Dolane would not like to live much at such a little place as this."

"This will be always home; although," with something like a sigh, "I suppose, Belle

will want to spend each season in town. She is fond of pleasure and excitement. Vinnie, I wish you would let me bring her to see you now."

She shook her head.

"Please, no. She would find me so stupid." And finding the subject was distasteful to her, he allowed it to drop, and employed himself in making her walk as enjoyable as possible.

This little jaunt was the first of many, and scarcely anyone commented upon their frequency.

Guy was nine years Vinnie's senior, and had known her all her life, and certainly neither of them thought of any wrong to Belle. But an officious friend remonstrated with the young lady upon tamely allowing Guy to pay Miss Orme so much attention.

"Oh," said Miss Dolane, "she is but a child—only sixteen."

"She is a very pretty child. Her mother was a lovely woman, and Vinnie grows wonderfully like her. You must be very sure of Mr. Ullathorne's fidelity to countenance their friendship."

"I am," answered the beauty, with a complacent glance at her own reflection.

She was not by any means a jealous woman, and she knew Guy to be honourable. But she was tenacious of her rights, and she did not intend they should be disregarded. So she resolved to speak to Guy upon the subject that night.

It was not hard to find an opportunity. Mrs. Dolane, following her usual custom, fell asleep after dinner, breathing in a stentorian and annoying fashion, and the lovers—if lovers one might call them—sat apart in an alcove, made beautiful with autumn plants and flowers.

"Guy," said Belle, laying one large white hand upon his, "do you know you are making yourself and me ridiculous by your friendship with that little Orme girl? I want you to end it."

He looked her fully in the face.

"I see nothing ridiculous about it. Who has been talking nonsense to you? You are too good-natured to object to anything that gives me pleasure."

"Thank you," said Miss Dolane, sweetly, "that is very pretty of you, Guy; but, even at the risk of losing your good opinion, I must say I object for personal reasons to this intimacy. You are a young man, and Miss Orme, they say, is pretty."

"Do you mean to hint, Belle, that I would play the scoundrel to you? You have my promise, is not that sufficient?"

"I have your promise, oh, yes—your written promise," with a little cunning smile, "and I don't for an instant think you would behave unlike a gentleman. But my friends have not the same reasons for faith in you that I have, and they evidently consider me foolish to permit this thing to go on. I would rather be wicked than ridiculous, and so I say it must end."

"And I say," he answered, quickly, "that I do not owe it to you to forget old friends; I refuse to accede to this unreasonable demand!"

Miss Dolane flushed with vexation.

"I am, as you were pleased to tell me a little while ago, a good-natured woman; but there are limits to my good nature, and I really cannot see why you should entertain so high an opinion of those higglerly Ormes, they have no claim upon you, Guy, sit down, be a good boy, and listen to me. I have a right to ask this thing!"

"I refuse to acknowledge that; if it is mere jealousy—"

"It is not!" she interrupted, quickly, "I can hold my own; and now—I don't intend to quarrel—I will leave you to think over this matter until the morning. I am quite sure you will see things in a different light then." She would say no more on the subject, and as early as possible he took his leave.

As Miss Dolane nestled that night amongst her pillows, she said to herself,—

"Guy can be very obstinate when he chooses, and I don't believe he will give in. I really think I will see the girl, and appeal to her pride; yes, that will be certainly best." And then she fell asleep as easily as a child, and slept until the chill December sun was shining in her room, and all the world was astir.

She breakfasted in her usual indolent habit; then, dressing with utmost care, ordered the carriage and drove to Doctor Orme's house.

Vinnie stood aghast when she saw the carriage with its magnificent bays stop at their gates, and her heart beat fast as Miss Dolane, stepping out, came towards the house. At first she meditated sending word she was not at home, but then, reflecting that perhaps Guy's wishes had weighed with his betrothed, and for his sake she made friendly overtures, she hastened to smooth her curly locks, re-adjust her white collar, and then, with timid steps, made her way to the shabby drawing-room where Miss Dolane was waiting.

She was looking exceedingly handsome in her claret velvet and furs, and contrasted with her, Vinnie looked the merest child. The beautiful blonde regarded her critically a moment, then extending the tips of her daintily gloved fingers to Vinnie, drawled,—

"So you are Miss Orme; and I really must apologise to you for my most unceremonious visit. I am afraid you will consider me very presumptuous!"

"Not at all!" murmured Vinnie, who was almost overpowered by the other's magnificence and condescension.

"Pray sit down, child. I want to talk to you, and I am quite afraid I shall give you offence; good advice is never well received, and I have called to advise you with regard to Mr. Ullathorne. You have no mother, and probably no friend to counsel you!"

"I do not understand!" interrupted Vinnie, breathlessly, and with the delicate colour wavering in her cheeks.

"That is what I supposed, and it is really truest kindness on my part to enlighten your ignorance. Miss Orme, it is not customary in good society for girls to walk and drive alone with men to whom they are not engaged!"

She spoke quite calmly, planting her stab in the child's heart deliberately, and watching the effect. The gray eyes opened wide upon her in pained surprise.

"Miss Dolane, Guy and I have known each other all our lives; he has always been my friend."

That was all very well when you were a child; but you are very near womanhood now, and if your own sense of the fitness of things does not teach you how to act, it is well you have some one to advise you. You will understand," with a disdainful look and gesture, "I have no fear of Mr. Ullathorne's fidelity; but, like most men, he is fond of amusing himself, and I haven't the least doubt that your freshness makes you very amusing; but, you silly child, his attentions to you mean nothing, and will only compromise you!"

"Stay," said Vinnie, in a choked voice, "you must not say such things to me. They are cruel and unjust. Everybody knows that we are friends, and—and—oh! how can you be so cruel to me?"

"I am kind, and really, Miss Orme, it is utter nonsense to imagine such a thing as friendship between man and woman; it is sure to ripen into love on one side or the other!"

The blood flamed into the sweet pale face opposing her.

"No! no!" she cried, vehemently; but Belle stayed her with the old disdainful gesture.

"Allow me to know more of the world than you," she said, "I speak from personal observation. And now let me tell you what any girl of true and delicate instincts would do after such an interview as this. She would refuse to walk with or receive a man who is pledged to another woman; she would decline

his friendship, and no longer number him among her acquaintances. I speak solely for your good. I exact no promise from you; but should you, after this, grant Mr. Ullathorne such favours as have made you ridiculous already, I shall know how to act. I don't wish to be harsh with you; for really you are very young, and Guy has been thoughtless; but understand, once and for all, I will not share my lover with any woman!"

Then, having accomplished her mission, she drew her furs about her, and with a slight, contemptuous bow, passed out well satisfied with herself. But poor little Vinnie stood in the centre of the room, white and trembling. The cruel words had gone straight to the young warm heart, and a sense of shame mingled with a new strange pain overwhelmed her.

Miss Dolane's mission [had been only too successful.

CHAPTER III.

SHE had given the child of the fruit of the tree of knowledge to eat; and lo! the child was now a woman. She understood, as in a flash, why Guy's words had had such weight with her, why he was her hero and her guide. She knew now the secret of her heart which she had not even guessed before, and began to wonder what life would be if Guy came no more.

Of course he did not love her. She was glad to think that—because he was bound to this beautiful woman, who said cruel things with smiling lips. And then she said fiercely, to herself, she would keep Guy's friendship. No one had any right to wrest that from her, and no one would ever guess how dear he was to her.

Then with a return of her new-born shame, she covered her eyes and sobbed bitterly as she remembered that no "girl of true and delicate instinct" would endeavour to retain a man's friendship under such circumstances. Dashing away her tears she stood erect.

"Miss Dolane shall have no cause for complaint," she said, under her breath; and then she thought of taking counsel with Miss Caxton, only she so dreaded lest she should reveal her secret to her.

No; she must act by herself, and for herself. So she went back to her household duties, working with such feverish energy that the middle-aged servant regarded her with mild wonder.

In the afternoon Guy came.

"What! not dressed for walking, you lazy child? Hurry up, the afternoons are so short now."

"I am not going walking," she answered, quietly, almost coldly. "I have neglected my music and French lately. Now I am going to make amends."

"Nonsense! You must have exercise; and Miss Caxton is not a hard taskmistress. Besides, you are looking quite pale and tired."

But she was resolute, and just a little bit vexed with her, Guy took his leave.

Miss Dolane smiled as he entered her elegant boudoir. It was rarely he condescended to take five o'clock tea with her and her favourite friends. He "could not make small talk," he said. And, really, that little Orme girl had not behaved badly, for evidently she had told Guy nothing of their interview, or he would be less amiable.

So she smiled upon him and made as much of him as it was in her nature to do, and she hoped he had forgotten his foolish whim of the previous evening. Then, as the days went by and Vinnie constantly refused to walk with him, and as often absented herself from the room when he was present, he began to grow angry and restless.

A vague discontent to which he would give no name possessed him. He missed the child's bright intelligent talk, her vivid interest in all he said or did; the smile with which she had been wont to greet him,

the frank words of welcome spoken in that sweet clear voice.

When he did see her it struck him she was looking paler than she should, and that there was a chill reserve about her manner totally foreign to it.

But she gave him no chance of explanation, and at last he resolved to ask Miss Caxton the reason of the girl's changed manner.

But the little old maid could tell him nothing. She thought Vinnie had been quieter of late, but she attributed that to the many cares which devolved upon her. It was not like the child to be fickle in her friendships, and if Guy wished it she would question her on the subject.

As he certainly wished it, that same afternoon, when Vinnie entered, she said,—

"My dear, don't you think it would be better to take a little exercise this afternoon? It is nearly a fortnight since you went for one of your long rambles."

The girl did not look at her as she answered,—

"If I do not give you too much trouble, I would rather go on with my studies."

"You know, dear child, it is a pleasure to me to teach such an apt pupil. But I can't have you growing pale and thin; and it is hardly fair to Mr. Ullathorne to drop his friendship so abruptly. You were such constant companions."

Vinnie drew her breath hard.

"I shall not walk with him again," she said, in a very low voice. "We cannot be friends any longer."

"My dear, what is the meaning of this? How has Guy offended you?"

"It is not that. Mr. Ullathorne is most good to me; but, but—oh! dear, Miss Caxton, I had not meant to tell anyone, only my heart is so full I must speak;" and then she told the old lady of Miss Dolane's visit, and of her resolve to create no breach between the lovers.

Miss Caxton listened with a most unusual flush on her cheeks; but when Vinnie had ended, she said,—

"My dear, I think you are acting as you should; only I am angry that Miss Dolane should so have spoken to you, and I am afraid Guy has not chosen too wisely. I don't see that, under the circumstances, you could do otherwise than forego his friendship. But Miss Dolane is a foolish woman to suppose a child like you could dream of love, still less of treachery."

Vinnie sat quiet a moment, then she said,—

"I can give him no explanation of my conduct, and it hurts me to think he may believe me ungrateful; he has been so good to me. But it is better so; and he will soon grow accustomed to the change in me."

She sighed as she spoke, and Miss Caxton, guessing what pain it gave her to be thought fickle and capricious, but never guessing her love, resolved that Guy should know all the truth. It was only fair to Vinnie. Only of this she said nothing to the girl; but when Guy presented himself the next day at the Cottage she told him all. She was half sorry, when she saw his face, that she had done so.

"Guy," she urged, "Vinnie is very pretty, it is perhaps natural that Miss Dolane should be jealous of your friendship with her."

He rose with an impatient gesture.

"I am tired of it all, but, weary as I am, I shall behave as an honourable man. It is true that she—Miss Dolane—and I are wholly unsuited to each other; but I shall not fail her because of that. I daresay" (bitterly) "we shall be as happy as most married couples. But no woman, not even my wife, shall insult Miss Orme."

There was something in his face that alarmed the little old maid.

"Guy," she said, laying a small slender hand upon his arm. "Don't tell me that you love Vinnie, that would be too cruel. It is not so?"

"I don't know," he answered, moodily, "pon my soul I can't tell—perhaps I do—but what then? I am bound hand and foot to

another woman, and I am not likely to forget that, even if she would let me."

"I am sorry I confided in you; it would have been wiser to keep silence."

"No; I might have learned to think ill even of that child; now I am going to see her and endeavour to shake her resolution, and after that—well, after that I must have an explanation with Bella. Oh, don't think I shall ask my freedom—I shall not—but she has got to understand that I choose my own friends even as she does, and that I will allow no interference on her part." And then he was gone, and Miss Caxton, watching, saw he made his way towards the doctor's house.

He found Vinnie quite alone, engaged in mending a coat for Roy. But she started up as he entered, and, laying aside her work, waited for him to speak; and when he only stood looking reproachfully at her, she stammered,—

"I did not expect a visitor, Mr. Ullathorne; and, if you please, I am very busy!"

"That is a cold welcome," he answered, speaking with enforced calmness. "Vinnie, have you set me quite outside the pale of your friendship? Am I to suffer for another's cruelty?"

"What do you mean?" she faltered, with pale quivering lips.

"That Miss Caxton has told me all. Child, I never knew, I never guessed, the reason for your coldness; if I had, do you believe I would have suffered such an insult to have been put upon you. Vinnie, you must forget Miss Dolane's jealousy—I cannot afford to lose my little friend."

The small white face and dark eyes met his beseechingly.

"You must not come here any more," she said. "Miss Dolane is right, and I never thought—"

"What is it you did not think?" he asked, as she broke off suddenly. "Was it that you did not know how unreasonable and cruel a woman can be? Vinnie, I do not release you from your promise of friendship; I shall come here as I have always done, and you will share my walks, just as though this had never happened."

"No," said the girl, "if you have any regard for me, you will keep away from our house. You owe so much to Miss Dolane's wishes, and I will make all necessary excuses and explanations to papa."

She seemed suddenly to have grown into a woman, and the change in her startled him; but he would not yet accept her decision as final. With a quick movement he had taken both her hands in his, and looking into her face he said,—

"Vinnie, answer me this one question. Are you tired of me and my friendship? Do you wish it ended?"

She tried to lift her eyes to his, but could not.

"You know, Mr. Ullathorne, it is not that," she faltered. "Oh, at least believe that!"

"I do, and so I will not abide by your resolve."

"You must; if you try to see me again, I will ask papa to let me go away! I will not widen the breach between you and Miss Dolane."

"You are very cruel, Vinnie; I think you don't quite know how cruel. Perhaps one day you will relent, and let me come back to you on my old footing. I wanted nothing but to serve you."

"Don't!" she broke in wildly. "Can I ever forget how good you have been to us all, or how much I owe you? But it is better you should come here no more—it is your duty to her!" She lifted her eyes a moment then to his, and in that glance their mutual secret was revealed, and a fierce temptation beset Guy to tell her all she had grown to him; but he conquered it, remembering Bella. He must never speak words of love to this girl, she was not for him! With a sigh he drew her nearer until his arm encircled her waist.

"Dear," he said, hoarsely, "you have decided well, and I will accept your decision, although it is hard. I shall hear of you sometimes; and if at any time you need help, you will know where to find me, and will not scruple to apply to me—for the sake of a life-long friendship. Good bye, little Vinnie; I shall not come again until I bring my wife with me. Heaven bless you, dear," and then he softly touched her brow with his lips, and so was gone.

She watched him go, with eyes that could not weep, and then she knelt down and prayed for him, as never in her life had she prayed before; she never thought of herself or of her happiness—it was upon his she dwelt, and for his she implored the listening Heavens.

Guy Ullathorne went straight to the Holt, where Belle received him with smiles, totally ignoring his gloomy look.

"How good of you to come so soon; there will be plenty of time for a gallop over the moor."

"I do not propose to ride to day; I want to speak with you."

"What a very terrific commencement!" she answered, smiling, but inwardly a little afraid of the storm she knew she had roused. "Well, you seem in no hurry to begin. You need not mind mamma!"

"What I have to say I shall say to you alone."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Very well, let us go into the next room. There is a fire burning there; I hate cold apartments, don't you?"

He made no rejoinder as he followed her moodily into the room she had chosen for their interview; but she did not seem to heed this, as, sinking into the easiest chair she could find, she said, with a smile,—

"I am quite ready to hear you now, Guy; what is it you want?"

"I think our wedding is fixed for the fifth of April?"

"Of course it is. How very ungallant to affect forgetfulness of it!"

"I am not in any danger of forgetting it," grimly, "and I shall not fail to keep my appointment. But as we are neither violently in love with each other, and I have little liking for the frivolities of a season in town, I propose taking a trip round Norway and Sweden. You have no objection, I suppose?"

"None," she answered, with a slight flush. "You will please yourself, of course; and as mamma and I go to town very early, I shall have no time to miss you. But may I ask the reason for this sudden change of plans?" and the placid blue eyes met his fully then.

"I was coming to that. It was only to-day I learned the absurd rumours set afloat by some charitable friend of yours; only to-day I learned the shameful part you played towards an inoffensive motherless girl. She was not my informant, so your anger need not fall on her; but I may as well tell you that she has utterly refused to accept or receive me as her friend. I have to thank you for this rupture between myself and her family. If I stayed here now, when the recollection of your cruelty is so fresh, we should certainly quarrel!"

"Then you had best go," interrupted the young lady, callously. "I object to scenes of any description; they are such bad form. Gracious, Guy! how hideous you look with such a frown on your brow!"

He went nearer to her.

"I wonder," he said, "if you have any heart. Sometimes I think you are utterly without feeling; and then, Heaven forgive me! I all but hate you! I think I never shall forgive you for the part you have played towards that poor child!"

"Oh, yes, you will, when you come to realise that I saved you from a very foolish entanglement, and her from probable pain, she looks a romantic child. You are a bit angry with me now, but you won't nurse your resentment; and I am quite sure, Guy, we shall be

far happier than the majority of folks who marry for love. Come, kiss and be friends!" He turned fiercely on her.

"You don't know what you ask!" he said; "and as we are to go through life together, it is as well you should understand thoroughly what manner of man I am. If either before or after marriage you presume again to meddle maliciously with my affairs, I swear solemnly I will never look on your face again, or hold any further intercourse with you!"

"Thank you for your plain speaking. When do you go?"

"As soon as possible." Then with a sudden, despairing hope, he added, "Belle, you must see how utterly unsuited we are each to the other. Will you give me my freedom?"

"No, I won't!" she answered, emphatically. "I don't choose to pose as a jilted maiden; and I certainly do not intend Vinnie Ome should occupy a place that is mine by right. You are mad to ask such a thing!"

"I suppose I was. Well, let matters rest as they are; only don't reproach me in the future with any misery your decision may entail."

She smiled in a superior fashion.

"I am not afraid of the future; and one day you will be thankful that you chose a woman who had no stupid sentiment. You are so soon carried away by emotion yourself that I shall act as ballast to you. Now, you must have tea, you won't refuse." And then she rose, and going to him kissed him lightly and carelessly upon the cheek.

Never, oh, never until then had he so loathed the fetters that bound him to this beautiful soulless woman, who cared for him just in proportion to his wealth and position, who loved nothing but her own beauty, and no one but herself.

Two days later Guy Ullathorne started on his trip, Belle bidding him a smiling good-bye, and lightly begging him to be careful of himself. He did not see Vinnie any more, neither did he leave any message for her with Miss Caxton. Perhaps he dared not trust himself to do so.

All Morden wondered at his departure, but Belle made very plausible excuses for him, and was so bright and smiling that no one guessed the real truth of the matter; and in early February she and Mrs. Dolane went to town, and Vinnie experienced a sense of relief and peace to which she had long been a stranger.

It was good to be able to walk about the roads and lanes without fear of encountering Guy's "sweetheart"; it was restful now to spend the quiet hours in church with no fair disdainful face opposing her. And if she was paler and graver than formerly, this called for comment from none; had she not so many cares upon her shoulders?

But all at home felt the benefit of her gentle rule, and the doctor spoke smilingly of a day not far distant when he should once more ride in his own trap.

"For, Vinnie, my dear," he said, "thanks to your economy, I owe scarcely twenty pounds now. I don't know what I should do without my little housekeeper, or how it was I did not understand her worth before," and listening to his words, Vinnie was a proud and almost happy girl.

One letter, and one letter only, had come from Guy, and that was addressed to the doctor. It contained a brief message to Vinnie, kindly, brotherly, nothing more; but it was something to live upon.

When the doctor searched for the letter next day it was nowhere to be found, and only Vinnie could have told where it was hidden or what comfort it brought to her.

CHAPTER IV.

EARLY in March, Guy returned to England, but not to Morden. His first duty was to his betrothed; and he wrote apprising her of the time and day of his return.

He was miserably conscious that his heart was more than ever alienated from her; that if she ever had any charm for him, that was far away in the dead and dreary past.

Her pink and white, the sheen of her golden hair, the deep blue of her languorous eyes had lost all power to stir his pulses ever so little. Hers was a mere animal type of beauty, and not calculated long to hold such a man as Guy in thrall.

And yet, because he was so intensely indifferent to her, he was all the more careful not to slight her even in seeming.

So, having rested and refreshed himself, he made his way to the bijou house Mrs. Dolane occupied during the season.

The servant, who opened the door to him, knew him.

"Miss Dolane is out, sir. She said would you please wait her return; she would not be late."

He went in, and upstairs to the room she usually occupied. There was a bitter smile on his lips as he sat down by a window and waited for her coming.

"She might have stayed at home to-day of all days," he thought; "but I suppose I am less to her than her pleasures. Oh, what a fool I have been! to what a loveless woman I have linked myself."

Presently a stream of carriages began to pass in rapid succession, telling that the Park was emptying itself of the fashionable *habitués*. By-and-by a neatly appointed brougham stopped at Mrs. Dolane's door. A gentleman was riding beside it—a man Guy knew and disapproved; and he frowned a little at the *empressment* with which he parted from his fair companions, holding Belle's hand in his far longer than was necessary.

Before her engagement, Lord Fontaine had been one of her most pronounced admirers, and it did not please Guy to find him again on terms of intimacy with her.

But he would not render their meeting unpleasant by passing strictures on her conduct. So, as she came slowly upstairs, he rose to meet her with a smile.

She entered with that stately air she so much affected, and even he, who did not love her, was fain to admit she was very beautiful.

"Ah! Guy," she said, with a pretty smile, "you are earlier than I expected. I can't say travel has improved your appearance. You look positively worn," and then she offered her cool cheek to be kissed. "Have you taken nothing since you came? Oh, well, I must send Phelps to attend to your wants, whilst I remove my wraps."

He was still holding her hand, and there was something of wistfulness in his dark eyes. If only she would show a little pleasure at sight of him!

"Belle," he said, "aren't you going to tell me you are just a little bit glad to see me?"

She smiled again, that same meaningless smile.

"Of course I am glad, but you won't expect me to go into raptures? You know I am not at all of the gushing order of womanhood. You must be content to take me as I am."

He fell back from her, his heart like lead in his breast; but not another word did he say. Perhaps he dared not trust himself to tell her how in that moment he regarded her.

He dined with mother and daughter quite *en famille* and was surprised when, the meal being ended, Belle rose, with a careless excuse, saying she had to dress, and she was "quite sure he would excuse her and mamma, and he could come round early in the morning."

"I thought," he said, "you would have kept to-night free."

"I did not suppose you would wish it; and there is no need," laughing, "to surfeit ourselves with each other's society. We shall have all our lives in which to get tired of our yoke."

There she stood smiling down upon him, as serene and careless as though he were but a

chance acquaintance. He almost hated her as he looked on her.

"How funny," she said, "that you should begin to develop signs of jealousy so late in the day. There, you stupid boy, don't look so ferocious—I will give you all to-morrow—no, not to-morrow, for I am engaged, but the next day. Now you must wait and see me in all my bravery. Mauresque has made me the loveliest gown imaginable for the occasion!"

"What is the occasion?" Guy asked, a trifle grimly.

"Oh, did I forget to tell you? It is an engagement of long standing, or, of course, I would have postponed it. Lord Fontaine is taking mamma and I to the opera to-night."

"I don't like the man. I object to your friendship with him!"

She raised her eyebrows in corate surprise; then she said,—

"Well, we won't quarrel about it to-night. You shall lecture me to-morrow to your heart's content;" and so she went away to dress, and when she came down again, despite his anger he was compelled to acknowledge her beauty.

She wore white satin, with a Greek border in gold about the hem; a golden zone encircled her waist, and there were white flowers in her hair, and at her breast.

"Acknowledge my dress is a triumph of art," she said, with a smile. "Really, Mauresque has excelled herself!"

"Pity she was so extravagant with the train, so meagre with the bodice. I hope I shall never see you in anything quite so outrageous again," he answered, with a vexed glance at the gleaming bosom and arms.

"Pooh!" said Belle, lightly, "you are savage with me for deserting you. Do you know, Guy, there is a rather vulgar old saying to this effect, 'What is sauce for the gander is sauce for the goose.' And I am giving you a little lesson in the treatment to which you subjected me at Morden. Now you really must go, I am expecting Lord Fontaine momentarily; and as both you and I object to figure as love-sick folks, let us say good-night."

He laughed bitterly. "There is no danger of being confounded with such primitive swains—in our case—good-night."

And then he went out feeling he had been most ignominiously dismissed; his heart was full of anger, and from the depths of his soul he loathed himself for the folly which had bound him to Belle Dolane. And she—well, she went to the opera, and admired the gay dresses and glittering jewels; listened to the flatteries of her admirers, the whispered words of Lord Fontaine, and was deaf to the music and the pathos of "Faust."

She said next day she had had a delightful evening, but she could not have given the slightest account of what had been passing on the stage, having been too much occupied with her own affairs.

The days passed swiftly, and March was drawing fast to a close; and with each day Guy had more reason for dissatisfaction. Fontaine haunted Belle, was her constant attendant, and she was far from showing displeasure at his openly expressed preference for her society, and laughed at what she was pleased to call his jealousy. At last one day he found her alone.

"Belle," he said, "I have tried for this opportunity for a long while, but have never found it until now. I think you owe me some duty—you who will so soon be my wife—and I tell you plainly, I will not permit Lord Fontaine to dance attendance upon you. You once said you would share your lover with no other woman. Now I say my betrothed shall be mine only; do you hear?"

She looked up with a languid, insolent smile.

"Until I am your wife I shall please myself," she said, coolly.

"But you will not be allowed," he answered quickly. "You must choose between Fon-

taine and myself; I will not be the laughing-stock for our hundred and one dear friends. I will not have my wife's name made the subject of common gossip. Belle, let us try to understand and consider each other more. I know I am not giving you all that I should, but I honestly mean to do my duty by you. Won't you do the same by me?" and in his earnestness he took her jewelled hands in his. She snatched them away impatiently.

"I hate heroics!" she said, "and I don't see why you should object to Lord Fontaine's society for me."

"It ought to be enough for you that I do object," he answered, pained beyond measure; "and Belle, I tell you plainly, late as it is, and despite all the uncharitable conclusions I know will be drawn of me—I will never make you my wife unless you promise to forego all further intercourse with Fontaine."

She looked up at him sullenly. "A lame excuse is better than none," she said, coarsely, "you are seeking a loophole for escape, and then you will go back to that sly little Ormeau girl!"

"You know that you are wronging me," he said, sternly, "and you know that I have just cause for complaint. But you shall not have reason to say I acted otherwise than honourably to you. I give you three days in which to make your choice; but I will have no half measures and, until you have decided, I shall not see you again."

"Very well," she answered, still sullenly. "I will give you my answer in the stated time. I think there is no more to say except that I consider you are preposterously exercising more than a husband's rights;" and with those words she swept from the room, leaving him a prey to all bitter thoughts and vain regrets.

The second day came; on the morrow Miss Dolane's answer to her lover's demands must be given, and she began to feel a little nervous. She did not wish to lose Guy unless she could secure a better *parti*, and she had so few hours left in which to decide. "One thing is in my favour," she thought. "Fontaine dines with us to-night, and, if he does not declare himself, I must yield to Guy's ridiculous demands. I won't if I look favours me—he would be a most *coquette* husband."

She dressed that night with especial care, there was so much at stake, and in her blue and silver robes she was lovely enough to turn a staid head than Lord Fontaine possessed. All through the evening she exerted herself to please him, pandering to his vanity in every conceivable way, flattering him with looks and smiles, and low-toned speeches. And only when Mrs. Dolane fell asleep did she lay aside her brightness of manner, and assume an air of meek resignation which was wholly new to her. Fontaine was quick to notice the change in her, and following her to the distant window by which she stood, said,—

"What is it, Miss Dolane? What has gone wrong? In what way have I offended you?"

"You have not offended me," she answered softly, and sighed.

"Then why have all your brightness left you? I cannot bear to see you so depressed—won't you trust your trouble to me?"

She dropped her head.

"It is always hard to lose one's friends," she said, "and we have been such good friends."

"Why should you speak of losing me? What idea is this?"

She stood in the shadows, and her face looked soft and appealing as she raised it to his.

"My duty is towards my future husband," she said, meekly; "he has forbidden me to know you—the alternative is that we part."

Fontaine drew nearer.

"And what will you do, Belle; have you the heart to send me away?"

"I must!"

He had never meant to woo or wed her; but her beauty was a power, and he hated to

think Guy Ullathorne should win her from him.

"Tell me," he said, leaning towards her. "Is it your wish that we should part? Is Ullathorne more to you than I?"

"Do not ask," she murmured, "I must not answer you!"

"But you shall, Belle darling, choose between us now. Will you give up this prig and cling to me? Will you be my wife?"

She was trembling with excited triumph; but he was vain enough to construe her emotion into love for him, and this but increased his passion.

"You will not send me away, my beautiful darling; you love me—I know you do. Let Guy Ullathorne do his best or worst, he shall not take you from me!"

Then she let his arm steal about her waist, and gave him back kiss for kiss, whilst her heart throbbled wildly with the joy of success.

"Ernest," she said, "you will not tell mamma to-night; I am afraid she will be angry; let me break the news to her. She was always fond of Guy, and persuaded me into accepting him; but, oh! I was so unhappy!"

And he believed her; in his heart he laughed at the thought of Guy's defeat, never guessing how ardently he had desired his freedom, or how grateful he would be to Fontaine for encompassing it.

His lordship took his leave before Mrs. Dolans woke, Belle urging him to do so "lest mamma's anger should break upon him;" but no sooner had the door closed behind him than she went to her mother's side and, shaking her vigorously, said,—

"Wake up, mamma, I have news for you; such good news! Fontaine has asked me to marry him, and I have consented!"

"I am very pleased," murmured the sleepy lady. "You are a clever girl, Belle, and I never liked Guy, he is so masterful. And when are you to be married? We can't afford to delay!"

"We shall be married at once, that is on the day appointed by Guy for our union; it is only a change of bridegrooms—and such a change! I shall be Lady Fontaine! I always coveted a title; but Ernest isn't half so nice-looking as Guy—not that it matters at all!" Then she shrugged her shoulders impatiently, for Mrs. Dolans had fallen asleep again.

The next morning Guy waited for a message from Belle; but none coming, he at length repaired to Mrs. Ullathorne's—his aunt, a widow lady, yet on the best side of fifty, and of charming manners—and there Belle's note followed him. Hoping, he hardly knew what, he tore open the perfumed envelope, and glanced hurriedly over her written words.

"I have decided between you and Lord Fontaine; and as I am to marry him on the fifth of April, you are of course free. All your presents and letters, I will return by the next post. I do not think you have any cause for complaint; we never should have been happy together!"

In an access of anger and bitterness, he tossed the letter to Mrs. Ullathorne.

"Read that and console with me!" he said.

She read Belle's callous message, and turned to him with tears in her eyes.

"I congratulate you," she said, quickly; "I never liked her, and you would have been a wretched man had you married her. Guy, you will not say you love her still!"

"I am afraid I never loved her; I have hoped and longed for this release, and yet I feel humiliated that she should toss me aside like a broken toy or shattered fan!"

He never quite knew how it came about, but then he told her all about himself and Vinnie; and Mrs. Ullathorne, having heard his story, said,—

"One day, Guy, I must know this child. Oh, dear boy, you have escaped so narrowly, making shipwreck of your life, do not be in a hurry to choose again!"

"You don't know Vinnie, or you would love her with all your heart," he answered, flushing.

"She is as simple as a child, and yet so bright and clever, so true of heart!"

"Being so mere a child, Guy, you must have compassion on her; let her see other men before she makes her choice. But the season being over, I will go with you and make Miss Orme's acquaintance; then, if I see that her happiness is in you, yours in her, I will do what I can to further your suit!"

"When you know her you will love her," Guy answered, confidently, and then he wrote to Belle.

He bade her keep all the gifts he had ever bestowed upon her, and to destroy all the letters he had ever written her. For the rest he wished her all happiness. And angry as she was to feel her desertion had not given him pain, Miss Dolans was very glad he did not desire to possess himself again of those costly gifts.

His letters she burned without a pang, and she smiled as she read in a society paper the announcement of her marriage with Lord Fontaine. He was both rich and titled, she wanted nothing more.

The wedding was the event of the season, and even down at Morden it was common gossip. Some pitied Guy Ullathorne, some said he was to be congratulated, but all agreed that Miss Dolans had behaved very badly, and only Vinnie Orme kept silence, possessing her soul with patience until he came again, for surely he would come now Belle had no further claim upon him; and they would be friends once more.

In her humility the child asked no more, hoped no more, but for the renewal of their old companionship.

And at the close of June, Guy and Mrs. Ullathorne arrived at Morden, where they intended staying until September.

CHAPTER V.

Vinnie was now seventeen, but, by reason of her many responsibilities, was older in thought and feeling than her years.

It was no evanescent passion she cherished for Guy. He had been her hero from childhood, and that hero-worship had grown with her growth until it merged into a deep, all-abiding, and, it need be, all-sacrificing love.

She trembled and grew pale when she heard that Guy was returning. She knew that in the hour of their parting he had loved her, but she dared hardly hope he loved her still, so poor was her opinion of her own charms and merits.

He purposely timed his first visit so that he should find her alone. She was sitting making up accounts by a window, when he opened the gate and entered.

At the sound of his step she started, looked up, and then rose all trembling and white. Go to meet him she could not. Her brain was in a whirl, her heart beat so hard and fast that she could hardly breathe.

With love in her eyes she watched him draw near. Then he was lost to sight as he went round to the hall door. Another moment she heard the quick, ringing notes of his voice, his firm step along the hall, then his hand was on the door, and he stood before her.

"Vinnie," he said, "I have come back to you."

She held out her hand to him. Perhaps he understood she could not speak in this first hour of re-union, neither with him were words easy; but he looked into her eyes and read the secret of her innocent heart over again, and was almost satisfied.

"Aren't you going to give me welcome?" he asked, leading her to a chair, and sitting down beside her. "It seems ages to me since we said good-bye."

"I am very glad—we are all very glad to see you back again," she answered, speaking in low, unsteady tones, and then, with wistful eyes upraised to his, "We were so sorry when we heard about—about Miss Dolans."

"You need not be. Do I look as if I had suffered much. No, Vinnie, 'my blessing lay in her forsaking.' Don't you see that new hope of happiness has come to me? Child, what have you done to yourself. You have grown a woman all at once!"

She laughed a little.

"I don't think I am any taller, but I look older because I have put up my hair."

"Oh, that is what I miss. What a shame to tie up those curly locks. I protest against the change."

"I am afraid your protest will be useless. It would be absurd now to wear my hair in child-fashion. Why, Nellie is fifteen now and quite a great girl; I should have no authority over her at all if I did not assume a certain sort of dignity."

And then she told him all her news, how clever Roy and Clement were proving themselves; how greatly Nellie and Floas were indebted to Miss Caxton; and how much brighter "papa's prospects" were; and whilst she talked, a trembling happiness possessed her.

He leaned over her chair, noting every change of light and shade on the delicate, exquisite face; every new expression in the clear dark eyes, and he loved her with the love of his perfected manhood.

But remembering Mrs. Ullathorne's words, "Being so mere a child, you must have compassion on her, let her see other men before she makes her choice," he told her nothing of his heart's desire; and she was more than content since he had come again.

When she had ended her simple story, he said,—

"Now, Vinnie, I have news for you. I am not going to live in solitary grandeur at The Towers. My aunt, Mrs. Geoffrey Ullathorne, has kindly consented to do the honours of the place until I bring home a wife. So now, dear, I may hope to see you oftener there. I want you to make acquaintance with all the old place contains, and as my aunt is particularly anxious to know you, I want you to bring Nellie up this afternoon, and we will take tea in the rose garden. I have so much I wish to show you."

"Is Mrs. Ullathorne very fashionable?" asked Vinnie, doubtfully.

"She is the leader of the most select circle in town; but she has the kindest, warmest heart, and I am quite sure you will be very great friends. You will come?"

"If you wish it, yes, but I am so shy of strangers. I shall be sure to disgust Mrs. Ullathorne with my stupidity. You will be ashamed of me."

"Shall I?" laughing; "that remains to be proved. I am not afraid to try the experiment. Ah! who is this young lady?" as a small white-frooked individual entered, and stood looking at him with wide blue eyes.

"Why, I declare it's May! Now, I'll be bound you can't tell me who I am, May!"

"Yes, I can. You're Guy, and how do you do?" gravely, offering a small hand. "I member you very well."

After May's entrance, there was no further chance of a *tête-à-tête* with Vinnie; constant interruptions were occurring, and presently Guy took his leave, returning in the afternoon to escort the girls to the Towers.

Nellie was in a state of greatest delight, her blue eyes sparkling with pleasure, her pretty face flushed and animated.

"Oh, Guy!" she said, enthusiastically, "you are just the dearest boy under the sun! When we were younger we never had any fun that was not of your making. You are our veritable fairy 'male' godmother! And I have always wanted to see the Towers; I have heard so much of its quaint corridors and old pictures. Is it true there is really a dungeon, or is that only fiction?"

"Fiction pure and simple, Nell. The Towers is hardly old enough to possess such a luxury; neither has it a secret room, nor a hidden passage."

"Don't, if you please," said Nell, "you are

taking the gilt off the gingerbread. I am half inclined to return home; but for Vinnie, I would, but I am morally certain she needs my support."

"Nell knows what an ardent coward I am," smiled Vinnie.

She was unusually quiet throughout the walk, perhaps because of the great happiness possessing her; perhaps, too, because she was wondering what impression she would produce on Guy's aunt.

She was looking lovely in a white gown of soft muslin with black ribbons. Guy thought he had never seen her so fair as now, and it was with an air of proud proprietorship he presented her to Mrs. Ullathorne.

The lady gave one keen searching glance into the fair pure face, then she bent and kissed her gently.

"My dear, I am pleased to know and to welcome you here. We seem to be quite old friends. Guy has spoken so often of you to me;" and then she devoted herself to the smiling, blushing Nell, whose arch looks and merry speeches afforded her great amusement, and Guy was left free to entertain Vinnie.

Together they "did" the picture galleries, wandered through quaint old rooms and corridors, seeing all there was to see; then they had tea in the lovely rose garden where blossoms of every conceivable shade cast their fragrance on the warm soft air.

And Mrs. Ullathorne insisted that her young guests should remain to dinner. Afterwards she sent them home in the carriage, and, having waved her hand to them as they drove off, turned to Guy, with the words,—

"She is simply exquisite; a beautiful innocent child—I hope you will win her. There is the making of a splendid woman in her."

"Thank you, aunt, as much for your praise of her as your wishes for my success. Tomorrow I shall see Doctor Orme."

And he did. The Doctor, who was looking younger and brighter than he had done for long years, was not a little surprised at his revelation.

"Why," he said, "it is only a month or two ago since you were engaged to Miss Dolane. You cannot know your feelings with regard to Vinnie in so short a time."

"I loved her long ago," he said, "but my tongue was tied by my engagement to the present Lady Fontaine. You will not forbid me to win Vinnie if I can?"

"No. I am not unconscious of the great honour you are doing my child; but I will not have one word of this broached to her, until the rupture of your engagement is at least six months old. This is a censorious world, and there are many who, being envious of Vinnie's good fortune, would accuse her of causing Miss Dolane—Lady Fontaine—to act as she did. The fact is, Ullathorne, I would much prefer the child to remain unfettered until her eighteenth birthday."

"I think, sir, you are rather hard upon me," grumbled Guy.

"No, I am not; and forgive me, my duty is first to my child. She is so inexperienced, she may readily mistake affection for love, and Heaven forbid she should learn love's lesson after she was a wife. Ullathorne, that girl has been our salvation; would you have me regard her happiness lightly? I don't place any restriction upon your visits; she is free to see you always, so long as you promise to say no word of love to her throughout the next six months. Will you do this?"

"I suppose I must; but you won't expect me to accept such terms very joyfully. Whilst I hold peace, some other fellow may step in and wrest her from me."

"If that should be, you will know that the child had never anything but a passing fancy for you, and that I acted for the best. At all events I shall not go from my conditions, and you are quite young enough easily to spare six months out of your life."

And despite all remonstrances and entreaties on Guy's part matters were left thus. Mrs. Ullathorne highly approved the doctor's conduct. Vinnie was very happy in those days; it was true Guy had spoken no word of love to her, but there are a thousand looks and signs by which the most innocent girl may guess a man holds her dear, and she lived in such a blissful dream that she could well afford to wait for him to speak.

The golden summer sped by and autumn came. Then Guy improvised merry little parties in search of berries and nuts; and it was curious how few Vinnie's basket ever contained, and how far behind the others the seniors walked.

Nellie, who was an astute young lady, drew her own deductions, but said nothing; only she took the deepest interest in the lovers' proceedings and contrived to prevent them being often molested. Then, just as Guy's time of probation was expiring, he was called away to the bedside of a dear old friend who had fallen a victim to consumption.

"I hate to go now, Vinnie," he said, as he held her hands in his. "I hate to leave you if only for a day; but I cannot refuse poor Maltravers's entreaty. He once saved my life at great risk to himself; it is but right that if my companionship can cheer his last days he should have it."

"It is right," said Vinnie, "you would be cruel to refuse."

So he went away, and Christmas was a dull time with them all, and poor Maltravers lingered so long that a new season had begun before Guy's release came. Mrs. Ullathorne had carried Vinnie to town with her.

"Let her see the world," she had said to the doctor. "It will not spoil her, but will teach her to know her own heart—it will be best for her and Guy."

"But the expenses?" urged Dr. Orme.

"I shall defray those; Vinnie shall go as my companion to save your pride and hers. And Nellie must try to fill her place; for if Guy wins her, you will not have her long with you."

It was a new world to Vinnie, this great noisy city, with its wonderful sights, its luxury and squalor, its magnificence and its poverty; and she took such a healthy delight in all she saw, that Mrs. Ullathorne said it was a pleasure to be her guide.

She went to the opera, and listened with rapt face and star-bright eyes; she saw the best dramas and tragedies of the day, and was all unconscious that her cheeks were wet with tears, or white with her intense sympathy with suffering hero or heroine. She was so fresh, so sweet, so unconscious of her own growing beauty, that she had a charm all her own. Men began to hover about her, and she accepted their homage as a child accepts kindness. There was no coquetry in her nature; and if there had been, her love for Guy would have killed it.

Amongst all who hovered about her was a young fellow, by name Bertie Lyon, a pleasant lad of gentle birth and good fortune, a distant connection of Guy's; and though he had not yet attained his majority, match-making mammae sought him eagerly because he had no parents to consult as to his marriage, and would soon be free of his guardian's control. He was so unaffected, so boyish in ways and speech, that Vinnie showed him greater kindness than she would otherwise have done; besides, he was Guy's relative, and so entitled to consideration from her. She never thought how her conduct might be misconstrued, she had no idea the boy loved her—to her he was but a boy—but Mrs. Ullathorne was alarmed and grieved for Guy, and wrote him thus.

"MY DEAR BOY,—

"You must not be startled if on your return you find a change in Vinnie. The dear child is artlessness itself, and has not learned to conceal her feelings. I think now, as I have always done, that Dr. Orme acted very

wisely in exacting the conditions he did. Vinnie was too young to know her own mind; I think she did not even know the meaning of love, but, if you would judge for yourself, come to town at once. Your rival is Bertie. He and Vinnie have so much in common; they are so nearly of an age. And you will not blame the poor child—she was not bound to you in any way. We go to Mrs. Leddesdale's ball on Thursday, and I have a card for you. Come if you can.

"Your affectionate aunt,

"URANIA ULLATHORNE."

Guy had just buried his dearest friend, and coming, as his aunt's letter did, so swiftly after his loss, it all but unmanned him. He was not in a fit mood for pleasure, but all the same he travelled up to town on Thursday morning, and at night presented himself at Mrs. Leddesdale's. Neither his aunt nor Vinnie expected him, so that he had ample opportunity to watch the latter's movements before announcing himself.

Presently he found the figure he sought. Was that Vinnie, that lovely slender girl in robes of purest white? How beautiful she was in her soft and modest gown! She was carrying a bouquet of white flowers, and her partner was Bertie Lyon—Guy set his teeth in a sudden paroxysm of rage. Then his better nature came to the fore: if Bertie could make her happy, who was he that he should come between? In their walk they paused quite near him, and he heard Vinnie say softly,—

"I have not thanked you yet, Mr. Lyon, for these lovely flowers; it was kind of you to remember me. I think I shall never forget this my first ball—it has all been so much nicer than I expected?"

And then Guy could no longer restrain his mad longing for a word and a glance from her, and, stepping forward, said only, "Vinnie!"

With a little cry she dropped her flowers. Her face was white as they, and, as she held her hand to him, he saw that it was trembling violently. If he had not been blinded by jealousy and pain, he must have guessed the truth. As it was, he misconstrued these signs of emotion, and believed from his heart that she had a guilty sense of having wronged him. "I did not know that you were back," she said, lifting wistful eyes to his, for something in his manner hurt her.

"I have but just returned," he answered. "I hope you are having a good time, Vinnie. I don't suppose if I asked for a dance I should get one."

"My tablets are full, but I—I think Mr. Lyon would forego this waltz," and she turned to Bertie with a pretty entreating air.

But Guy broke in,—

"He would hate me for ever and a day for depriving him of so much pleasure; and I am not a very skilful dancer."

She was too pained to say more, and presently moved away with her partner; nor did she exchange any further speech with Guy that night. But later Bertie went to him.

"Mrs. Ullathorne and Miss Orme have left, I am going too. I say, old fellow, won't you walk with me to my diggings? I want to talk to you;" and Guy, being too miserable to care much what he did, consented.

CHAPTER VI.

"Guy, old boy," said Bertie, placing his feet upon the mantel and puffing vigorously at a cigarette, "you know Miss Orme well, we have often talked together about you. Don't you think she is far and away the prettiest, nicest girl out?"

"She is very lovely, and as good as she is beautiful," Guy answered, with a bitter ache in his heart.

"I knew you would say so; and I want you to wish me luck. I feel sure she likes me, and I know I simply adore her. Fancy me a married man! By Jove! if only you guessed

how much I think of her, you wouldn't set there looking so calmly contemplative. Say something, old boy, if it's only 'Good luck to you.'"

"If it is only for your happiness—and hers, with a queer sound in his voice, I do wish you success. You have reasonable grounds for hope, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. Miss Orme is kinder to me than to any other fellow, and, you see, she isn't in the least little bit a coquette. She doesn't say or look one thing and mean another; and when the all-important day arrives, old man, I want you to give me your physical and moral support."

He ended with a light laugh, and Guy, who felt the torture was rather more than he could bear, rose, saying,—

"Weddings are not much in my line, Bertie."

"But you won't refuse to attend mine? What, are you going so soon? Well, no doubt you are a bit fagged after your journey and all that. Never mind, old fellow, we'll meet again to-morrow at Mrs. Ullathorne's. Ta-ta!"

And then Guy walked desolately homewards. Was it for this he had waited so long? Had he not a prior claim to Vinnie's love? She had loved him once: was she not to be won again to him? Could Lyon ever be to her what it was his hope to have been? He would not give her up without a struggle. And then his better and nobler nature came to the fore: if Bertie could make her happy why should he seek to come between them? Did he not love her well enough to make her welfare his first thought and aim?

"Heaven's blessing on you, my darling! my darling!" he whispered. "If it is best you should forget me and your old idle dream, I will not complain. Your life is of more value than mine. May it be replete with joy."

So he stood aside all the days that followed, leaving Bertie to plead his cause; and the anguish he endured made his manner towards Vinnie constrained and sometimes cold.

She was hurt and crushed by the change in him. Her eyes followed him wistfully wherever he went. But he dared not trust himself to look often towards her, and so he saw none of these things.

In her new-born desolation, in her growing despair, she turned naturally to Bertie for friendship; never guessing how she was fanning the flame of love in his heart, how she was torturing the man for whose sake she would have died.

One day she chanced for a few moments to be alone with Guy, and he hastened to speak on trivial subjects, but she stayed him with a quick little gesture.

"I must talk to you on something that weighs upon my mind, Mr. Ullathorne, she never now called him Guy. I want you to tell me how I have offended you. Let me know my fault, that I may remedy it."

"You have not offended me, Vinnie," and the pain he bore made his manner ungracious, his voice cold.

"We used to be such friends," she said, wistfully. "You were always kind to me; but since you came to town you never speak to me save under compulsion. You are not like yourself—and—and I am very unhappy."

"I am still your friend, and you are allowing your imagination to run riot. I am not changed. And do not let me hear you say again you are unhappy when you have so devoted a lover as Bertie Lyon."

The colour flamed into her cheeks, and her eyes were startled.

"He is my friend," she said, swiftly.

"Yes, dear; and when he is something nearer and dearer still, remember that I wished this, knowing it was for your happiness; and before she could make reply he was gone."

So this was the reason of the change in him: he did not love her any longer, and,

guessing that her heart was still his own, he yet could bid her find solace in another man's affection.

With a bitter sense of humiliation she covered her eyes, and burst into the wildest tears she had ever shed.

Oh! she could not stay here, she would go home. There was peace in the old place! What was that he had said about Bertie? Was it true he desired to be more than her friend? Poor Bertie! She had no love to give him. She would never marry now. Her life was over and done with!

After this she avoided Guy on every possible occasion. She treated him with a coldness which yet had something pathetic in it. Mrs. Ullathorne could not understand the change in the girl. All her brightness and vivacity had left her, and she took no pleasure in her pretty new gowns, or those entertainments specially provided for her.

Bertie, too, was distracted by her different method of treating him.

"A fellow might think she almost hated me," he said to Guy. "She doesn't seem to care about me any longer. Do you think it is because I have been so long declaring myself? Girls don't like laggards in love."

"Then why don't you put your fate to the test?"

"Because I am afraid to lose what chance I may have."

"Don't you remember an ancient couplet which runs thus:—

Fain would I climb, but fear lest I should fall;
If thy heart fail thee, climb not at all.

Why don't you take that for your guidance, eh, Bertie?"

"I will try; but it seems to me that even this suspense is better than the wretched certainty that she is lost to me. I used to feel so sure of winning her, but I am not now!"

"Perhaps it is better so," answered Guy, wishing with all his heart the wretched change the subject. "Women don't like their lovers to be too sure of their affection."

"It may be so, you are wiser than I," said Bertie. "If she says no, I don't care a hang what comes to me. I shall go to the dogs by the quickest road I can find!"

"You will be a contemptible cad if you do," answered Guy, coolly. "Would you like to think that all a girl's life was darkened by the thought that her rejection brought about your moral ruin? I think I know you better than that."

Bertie looked uncomfortable.

"You've such a deuced bad habit of calling a spade a spade," he said, petulantly, "and you don't understand what it is to love a girl with all one's soul. You can't help it, I suppose, it is an infirmity; but it makes you most confoundedly unsympathetic!"

And then he went away, and Guy was left in peace for the remainder of the day. A few evenings later each was invited to dine with Mrs. Ullathorne.

"Guy," said the lady on his arrival, "I am giving this dinner simply and solely to decide your fate and Bertie's. For days he has endeavoured to speak alone with Vinnie, but always she cleverly eludes him; and whether it is girlish bashfulness, or that she does not care for him, I cannot tell."

His heart beat high with a renewal of hope; but he said, calmly,—

"However she decides, may Heaven bless her choice!"

He thought Vinnie was looking very pale and depressed when she came down that night. She ate little and talked less, and when Bertie proposed they should go into the greenhouse she raised no objection. Perhaps she felt her fate was to be decided that night, and was glad to end it suddenly and sharply. Once alone with her, Bertie became desperately courageous.

"Don't give all your attention to those ferns," he said, boyishly. "I want you to

look at me and listen to what I've been trying to say for weeks. Vinnie, dear, won't you be kind to me? Don't you think you can learn to care for me just a little bit? I won't worry you, upon my soul I won't. I'll wait as long as you like. Only don't say no in a dreadful way that leaves no hope for me; you do like me?"

"I like you very much," she began, when he interrupted joyously,—

"Ullathorne thought you did, and he wished me good luck. He said the nicest things about our future!"

"Hush!" she cried, in a quick, anguished voice, "I must not hear you! I do like you, but not in that way. I never guessed that you cared for me so, until Mr. Ullathorne suggested it to me, and then I tried to believe he was mistaken. Oh! let me go away! let me go home, my coming has made only trouble!"

The poor young fellow was very pale, but the mere sight of her grief helped to calm and strengthen him, and he said, quite steadily,—

"Vinnie, dear, if any one must go away let it be me; but don't you think in time you could grow to care for me? I'll wait ever so long for you. I'll never be weary of waiting. Don't answer me now, take time."

And then she burst into bitter tears.

"Oh, don't don't!" she cried, between her sobs. "Your goodness breaks my heart! I would not hurt you if I could avoid it, but I must be true to myself and you. I can never do what you ask for, I never can love you as you wish!"

He drew a deep breath; then he said,—

"I have no right to ask; but, tell me, is there any other?"

She bowed her head, and a moment there was silence between them, then he said, slowly,—

"Is it Guy?"

She threw out her hands as if to ward him off, and then, as her head drooped lower yet, she murmured,—

"Yes. Oh! as you love me, keep my secret."

Silence again, then the poor white-faced boy said,—

"He is worthier than I. Vinnie, my dear, my first love, good-bye." So he went out, and in a corridor he encountered Guy. "I have got my dismissal," he said, with a little bitter laugh. "Go to her; she is alone and sorry for me," and not waiting any reply, he rushed out.

It seemed to Vinnie she sat there hours alone before Guy joined her. When she heard his step, she looked up, and she saw the tears were raining down her pale cheeks.

"Vinnie, I have seen Bertie; he tells me you have sent him away."

"I could do no other," she answered, between her sobs. "I tried to please you—I did, indeed—but I could not, I could not."

"Do you mean to say you would have forced yourself, if possible, to marry him, because you believed it to be my wish?" he asked, in amazement.

"Yes," she answered, under her breath; "you had done so much for me. I had done nothing, could do nothing for you."

"And you honestly believed I wished you to give yourself to another man?"

"You spoke as if you did—is it not true? Oh! then, what did your words mean?"

"Shall I tell you? Others besides myself believed that you had grown to care for Bertie; and though I knew you loved me once, Vinnie, I thought it was but with your child's heart; and, seeking your happiness, I would not, by word or deed, come between you and your choice. Bertie is near your age, he is a bright handsome lad; what more likely than you should love him first and best? But now that you have sent him away, I will never leave you until you have given me your reason for doing so. Vinnie, is it because you love another? Do you still love me?"

"Oh, Guy! oh, Guy!" broke from her pale lips, and then she lifted her eyes to his—the

lids were swollen with weeping, tear-drops still hung upon their lashes, but a new joy filled the deep, dark eyes. "I have always loved you," she said. "Oh, Guy! Oh, Guy! do not be cold to me again—it has nearly broken my heart!"

And then she was safe in his embrace, pressed close to the heart that would hold her dear for ever more, that would love her, reverence, and cherish her to the end.

Bertie Lyon did not go to the dogs. Two years later he married Nellie Orme, and Miss Caxton keeps the Doctor's house. He is a prosperous man now; but he does not forget how Vinnie came to his rescue long ago, and how she saved him from bankruptcy and despair.

Lady Fontaine is fast losing her beauty, growing daily more like her mother—fat, raddled, somnolent; but she is happy in an animal fashion, having all her heart's desires; only her heart is filled with envy when, now and again, she meets "that little Orme girl" in society, and listens to her praises. For Vinnie's beauty has grown with her happiness, and one has only to glance at Guy's face to see there the reflection of a happiness that will last so long as life endures.

[THE END.]

FACETIÆ.

EXPERIENCE is the cream of life—but it sours with age.

A TACK points heavenward when it means the most mischief. It has many human imitators.

It is pastime when one misses the train, although it may be difficult to determine where the fun comes in.

"THANKS," said the guest to the man who brought his soup at last. "You have taken a great wait off my mind."

The only objection to the self-made man is that in so many cases he has failed to put himself together so as to work noiselessly.

PROFANE: "I don't want you to make use of the word rum again, my son." "Why not, pa?" "Because rum is a curse."

PROFESSOR (to boy at blackboard): "How do you write horn?" Boy: "You don't write a horn at all. You blow a horn."

A: "Is land dear in Italy?" B: "No, but the ground rents are awful." "What's the cause of that?" "Earthquake."

PAT: Pat! you should never hit a man when he is down! "Begorra, what did I worruk so hard to get him down for?"

THERE is a fortune for the milliner who shall devise a bonnet that can be worn in any part of a church and always present the trimmed side to the congregation.

PRIMA FACIE EVIDENCE.—Priscilla: "Jack tried to kiss me last night, and, do you know, I believe he had been drinking." Angelina: "He must have been."

HAY FEVER VICTIM: "Doctor, can't you tell me how I can find relief from this constant inclination to sneeze?" Physician: "Yes, sir. Sneeze."

"Are you the mate?" said a Yankee to an Irishman whom he saw on the deck of a vessel lying in port. "No, sar," responded Pat. "O'm the man that boils the mate."

AT A MARGATE HOTEL.—Mrs. Keyboard: "Why do you always sit on the music-stool? You can't play a note." Old Stokes: "Neither can any one else while I'm here."

HAWKINS: "You were on the jury in the murder trial, weren't you? What was the verdict?" Lambson: "Acquittal." "In spite of such convicting evidence? What excuse had you?" "Insane." "What! All of you?"

MISUNDERSTOOD HIM.—Willia: "That donkey I bought from you kicked me. You said he was safe." Wallace: "Well, so he is. I didn't say you would be, though."

NERVOUS old lady (on board yacht): "Oh, dear! it'll go over, I know it will. Oh, Mr. Sailor, you won't let it capsize, will you?" Sailor (promptly): "Wot! afore I took the fares? Not likely!"

A NEW DISEASE.—"How is Mither Riley this mornin'?" "Worse. He was taken wid another disease lasht night." "Fwhat is it?" "The docther called it convalescent."

MRS. BREEZY (with hammer): "There, I've hit the nail on the head at last." Mr. Breezy: "Why do you put your finger in your mouth?" Mrs. Breezy: "That was the nail I hit."

THE NEW RECTON: "I find the work in this parish very interesting indeed." Miss A.: "I should think you might; there are ten unmarried girls to every man in the congregation."

HUNKER (who wants to propose): "Miss Scadda, let us go out on the porch. Shall I get your wrap?" Miss Scadda: "Thanks, but I sha'n't need it. You might put on your overcoat, however."

JUDGE: "What was in the barrel the officers seized from you?" Witness: "Wul, yer honor, it was marked 'whiskey' on wan ind and 'P. Duffy' on the other, so oi dunno whether it was whiskey in it or P. Duffy."

MRS. MCCARTHY: "Yer wages is 2s. 6d. short this wake, Moike." Mr. McCarthy: "Yis, Mary Ann. We had an explosion on Tuesday, an' the foreman docked me for the toime oi wuz in the air."

CONVINCING PROOF.—Pat: "Sure toime was invinted in Ireland." Jeweller: "Why do you think so?" Begorra! d'yez be ather thinkin' it's name would be O'Clock if it didn't come from the owld sod?"

"I TOLD Dr. Wray the other day that I believed I was the only living example of his patients." "Was he embarrassed?" "Not a bit; he acknowledged it." "What did he say?" "Said he was sorry to say I was."

"It's a blessed good thing," said Mawson, as he gazed on the ocean—"it's a blessed good thing the ocean's bottom is solid." "Why?" "Think of what a geyser there'd be on the other side of the earth if it leaked!"

A NEW REASON.—Mr. De Club: "My dear, a great German physician says women require more sleep than men." Mrs. De C.: "Does he?" Mr. De C.: "Yes, my dear—um—er—you'd better not wait up for me to-night."

THE five-year-old boy had seen his first wedding, and naturally the family asked him what he thought of it. "Pooh!" he said disdainfully, "it's nothing but a prayer-meeting with a sociable after it."

"Are you still taking painting lessons, Mamie?" "No, I left yesterday; I don't like my teacher." "Why not?" "He has such a disagreeable way of talking. He told me that if I kept on for some time longer I might be able to whitewash a fence."

SHIPPER CLARKE (to his employer, leaving the office): "Oh, Mr. System, haven't you forgotten your umbrella? It's raining." Mr. System: "Can't help it. I've made a resolution to have one here and one at home, to provide for all emergencies. Now, if I take this, they'll both be at home!"

Mrs. TEMPLE: "See that pretty Miss Barlow over there? She's over and ask her to join our table, Mr. Jones." "But she seems to be enjoying herself, and I am afraid to interrupt her." "Oh, make some nice apology to her; and that will be all right." "Excuse me, Miss Barlow," said bashful Mr. Jones, a moment or two later, "I'm sorry to say that I've been told to ask you to join our lunch party." "No, Mrs. Temple, she didn't come. She only said that if I felt as sorry as that she would excuse me this time."

WANTED MORE PRACTICE.—"No, Bobby," said his mother, "one piece of pie is quite enough for you." "It's funny," responded Bobby, with an injured air; "you say you are anxious for me to learn to eat properly, and yet you won't even give me a chance to practice."

A SENSIBLE FASHION.—Rural Aunt: "What in the world is that thing?" City Niece: "That's my upright piano." "Piano?" "Yes. It's draped in the new fashion—completely hidden, you know." "Oh! Well, that's sensible. Can't be seen or heard, can it?"

LANDLADY (starting the conversation): "How absurd the ancients were, when we think of it. They actually believed that the souls of the dead entered birds and animals." A Brutal Boarder: "Nothing absurd about that. Take this chicken we are eating, for instance. It was probably inhabited by the soul of a shoe."

"BUCKLE my shoe, Egbert," said a belle to her near-sighted fiancé. Egbert went down on his knee like a true knight; but, as he had lost his eyeglass, his vision was a little uncertain. "Is this your foot, darling?" he inquired. "Yes." "Aw, pawdon—I thought it was the lounge." Egbert is now disengaged.

ENTHUSIASTIC professor of physics (discussing the organic and inorganic kingdoms): "Now, if I should shut my eyes—so—and drop my head—so—and should not move you would say I was a clod. But I move, I leap, I run, I hop—then what do you call me?" Voice from the rear: "A clod-hopper." Class is dismissed.

THE TRAMP'S REVENGE.—Sour-faced Woman: "You get right out of here or I'll call my husband." Tramp: "Y'r husband ain't at home." Sour-faced Woman: "How do you know he ain't?" Tramp: "I've allers noticed, mum, that w'en a man is married to a woman wot looks like you he never is at home except at meal time."

"WHY, Jimmy," said one professional beggar to another, "are you going to knock off already? It's only two o'clock." "No, you mustn't head," responded the other, who was engaged in unbuckling his wooden leg; "I'm only going to put it on the other knee. You don't suppose a fellow can beg all day on the same leg, do you?"

A DEFINITION given by a well known public speaker, in an address to children. "Now, children," he said, "I propose to give you on the present occasion an epitome of the life of St. Paul. Perhaps some of you are too young to understand what the word 'epitome' means. 'Epitome,' children, is, in its signification, synonymous with synopsis." Having made this simple and clear explanation to the children the speaker went on with his story.

A STORY is told of Byron's wretchedness when his play, "Dearest than Life," was produced. At the end of the second act there was a long delay, and the audience grew very impatient. "What in the name of goodness are they doing?" asked a critic of the author. "I don't know," moaned Byron. At this moment the sound of a saw at work behind the curtain could be distinctly heard. "What are they doing now, my dear Byron?" said the critic. Here the author's keen sense of humour came to the rescue. "I think," he said, "they must be cutting out the last act."

A MASCULINE BOOK.—A story is told at the expense of Professor Zarib, the efficient director of the Maennerchor and professor of German at the Ulises Academy. "What is the gender of 'book'?" was the query to a student who persisted using the masculine "der" before the word. "It is masculine," replied the student. "You are mistaken. It is neuter," urged the professor. "Who ever heard of a masculine book?" "Why," rejoined the student, "I have lots of times, and so have you." "Never," said the professor. "What kind of a book is masculine?" "Hymn book," muttered the student, as a audible titter went round the class.

SOCIETY.

VELVET will be greatly used again this coming season.

The Duke of Sutherland is the largest land-owner in Great Britain.

STATISTICS go to show that the male population of the civilized world is falling farther and farther behind the female.

VELVET is largely advertised as being the material *par excellence* for the coming season and present races, from Fauntleroy to dowagers, and it does look effective in the best qualities and wears as long as wanted.

It is pleasant to hear that Sir Arthur Sullivan is so much better. The waters and the treatment at Contrexéville have done him a vast deal of good, and it is said he is now most hopeful about a speedy restoration to perfect health.

WHILE Her Majesty is in Scotland Windsor Castle is being repaired and several alterations are being made in St. George's Chapel. It is thought likely that the Empress Frederick will visit the Queen at Windsor on the return of the Court.

The little Crown Prince of Germany and his brother, Prince Adolbert, have just commenced to have violin lessons. Prince Adolbert, although only just seven, is said to possess great talent.

A MAN suited to drive the Queen, or the mail, is not to be found every-day. This driving of the Queen is the blue-ribbon of engine-driving life. Days beforehand arrangements are made, and very elaborate they are.

LORD and Lady Tennyson, who have been residing during the summer months at Aldworth, their place on the Hampshire Downs, near Haslemere, intend to return to the Isle of Wight about the middle of next month, and will pass the winter at Farringford.

THE announcement that Prince George of Wales is about to be betrothed to "a Russian Grand-Duchess" is quite erroneous. There is not a single "Russian Grand-Duchess" of marriageable age, excepting only the Emperor's elder daughter, who is engaged to the Grand Duke Alexander Michailovitch.

THE Queen has two beautiful little gold watches that are supposed to be one hundred years old. They have silver dials, and are about the size of a two-shilling piece. One is a blind man's watch, the other is a repeater. Both go perfectly, and are in constant use. Her Majesty's favourite watch is a large plain gold one by an English maker. It is about twice as big as an ordinary man's watch.

THE Queen is just now in excellent health, her Majesty having derived very great benefit from the bracing air of Deeside. Osborne does not really suit the Queen at any period of the year, and the air of the Solent is far too relaxing in the middle of summer to please her Majesty, who, always gets somewhat out of health by the time that she has been in the Isle of Wight for a month; but the invigorating Highland air acts like a powerful tonic, and invariably sets her up again.

THE presentation of fruit to the Lord Mayor by the Fruiterers' Company did not always consist of the magnificent assortment which it is now the practice to offer to the chief magistrate. In olden times the gift simply took the form of twelve baskets of apples. The fruit was carried to the Mansion House by porters from Farringdon Market, headed by the Company's beadle with his gown and staff. The Lady Mayoress used to place a bottle of wine in each of the empty baskets for the use of the carriers, who were then, says the Book of Ceremonies, "regaled with a dinner, and, having satisfied themselves, retired, taking with them the fragments for their evening supper." Of late years the apples have given place to pineapples, nectarines, peaches, and all the choice fruit in season.

STATISTICS.

BERLIN, with 1,315,600 people, has only 26,800 dwellings.

THERE are 3,000 Protestants to one Roman Catholic in Sweden.

IN Kent 30,000 people are engaged in hop-picking during the season.

IT has been discovered that almanacs date back to the year 100 A.D.

ABOUT one-third of the human race, 400,000,000 of people, speak the Chinese language.

A MAN gives off 4.08 per cent. carbonic gas of the air he respire; respire 19,666 cubic feet of carbonic acid gas in twenty-four hours, equal to 125 cubic inches common air.

GEMS.

ONE good remark is better than twenty dull or common ones.

THE best friends are those who stimulate each other to good.

MANY people mistake stubbornness for bravery, meanness for economy, and villainess for wit.

YOU will find, if you think for a moment, that the people who influence you are people who believe in you. In an atmosphere of suspicion men shrivel up; but in that atmosphere they expand, and find encouragement, and educative fellowship.

IT is a precept of good manners and good sense, and therefore of good style, to adapt your allusions to your audience. People who obtrude their particular "shop" on mixed company, or perplex the strangers within their gates with unintelligible family jokes, are guilty of intolerably bad manners. So, in literature, persistent allusions to out-of-the-way and obscure books and characters are equally a piece of bad manners. Allusiveness is felt to be offensive the moment the allusions are not understood.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

VEGETABLE MARROWS BOILED.—Pare the marrows, cut them in halves. Have ready a saucepan of boiling water, salted; put in the marrows and boil them till quite tender. Take them up very carefully, and arrange them on a hot dish, pour over white sauce, and serve.

EVERY housewife imagines she knows how to make lemonade, but the feeble, insipid concoction so often offered is a convincing argument to the contrary. Good lemonade requires plenty of lemon and sugar, and is improved by the addition of other fruits. A good rule calls for three lemons to one orange, one scanty cupful of sugar, and one-third of a cupful of strawberry juice; add a pint of pounded ice, stir well, then add a quart of ice-water.

SEED CAKE.—Half a pound of flour, quarter a pound of peel, quarter of a pound of butter, 3 eggs, 6oz. of sugar, quarter of a pound of sultanas, 2oz. of almonds, half a teaspoonful of baking powder, 1 tablespoonful of milk. Put butter and sugar in a basin, and beat them together with a spoon till they are white, then add yolks of eggs, and mix them in; then milk, and mix it; then put in the flour, and stir it well through the rest; then the baking powder and all the fruit. Put the whites of eggs on a plate and beat them up, and add them last. Pour it into a papered cake tin, and put it in the oven till it is ready. The almonds are skinned and split up, the raisins washed and dried, and the peel cut up in thin strips. If it is really a seed-cake you want, then leave out all the fruit and put half-an-ounce of caraway seeds instead.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE most sparsely populated British colony is Western Australia.

ITALY is the only country in the world where Italian soap is not used.

THE age of both parties is always given in Spanish marriage announcements.

As a set off against the drink craze plentiful fruit eating has been recommended among other things.

POSTAL money-orders are, it is believed, about to be experimentally introduced in Russia.

THE ruins of Bluebeard's castle are said to still remain in a lonely mountain road near Interlaken, Switzerland.

THE statement is made that in all their wars the British have won the splendid average of eighty-two per cent. of the battles.

FLIES frequently startle horses by entering their ears. This can be prevented by touching the inside of the animal's ears with a few drops of the oil of Juniper. The odour of Juniper is so disagreeable to flies that they will avoid any spot where it is.

IT is said that no magnet is truer to the pole than is the root of the cocoanut tree to the ocean, for, when the root breaks through the husk, it points directly towards the sea, no matter in what position the nut may be placed in the ground.

THE aquatic plant, the bladderwort, feeds on animal life. The tiny bladders attached to the leaves and leaf-stalks are each furnished with a door, the whole acting on the coil-trap principle. Any small water-creature that ventures to peep in is seized in the clutches of the murderous plant, and is at once swallowed and assimilated.

VARIOUS explanations have been given of the origin of the term greyhound, some authorities claiming that the prefix grey is taken from Grayus, meaning Greek; others that it signifies great, while still others say that it has reference to the colour of the animal. In no other breed of hounds is the blue or grey colour so prevalent, and consequently the last mentioned derivation seems the most plausible.

IN Paris any person wishing to perform as an itinerant mountebank, organ-grinder, musician, or singer must make application to the police for a license and produce a certificate of good character. The license must be produced to the police authorities every three months on pain of withdrawal. The possessors of the licenses are expressly forbidden to take about with them children under sixteen years of age, or persons who are blind, deformed, one armed, crippled, or infirm.

A PALINDROME is a line or phrase that reads the same backward as forward. The Latin language is full of such linguistic freaks; the English has but few. One at least is imitable; it represents our first parent politely introducing himself to Eve in these words: "Madam, I'm Adam." The following phrase lacks but one letter of being even more remarkable: "Lewd did I live, evil did I dwell." From the Latin we have! *Roma tibi subita motibus ibit amor*: "Rome, love will come to you suddenly and with violence."

VINEGAR is regarded by an American physician as a valuable therapeutic agent in catarrhal and membranous croup. Employed in the form of inhalation, it is, he considers, of first importance in the management of the disease, though he also employs internal medication. His method of procedure in cases of inhalation is to pour the vinegar into a pan, and then put in the pan bricks or flat irons heated in the stove. The room thus soon becomes filled with a cloud of acetic vapour. A German doctor reports the use of etherisation with good results in the case of a child aged thirteen months, who was apparently dead when he was called in.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

QUEEN ANNE.—Queen Anne died in 1714.

QUACK.—You must have a license to sell patent medicines.

BARRAVED.—The money goes to the husband in the absence of a will.

B. A.—Royal Artillery battalions are not numbered but distinguished by letters.

S. O. L.—A debt is recoverable within six years of the last acknowledgment of it.

C. B.—Clifton Suspension Bridge was constructed of the removed Hungerford Bridge.

FAITH.—A domestic servant may give, or be given, a month's notice at any time.

DETERRE.—If he provides and offers a home he has done all that can be required of him.

JOWATHAN.—Rev Dr. Hermann Adler, Chief Rabbi, Jews College, Tavistock-square, London.

COUNTRY BUMPKIN.—To hear through the telephone each person must use a separate pair of receivers.

TOM'S OWN.—The 25th Battery Field Artillery are at Kurrachee, Bombay.

G. Y.—The 4th lost last cost 10½d. in December, 1867. It was 10d. at the end of 1872.

NOVICE.—A tenant is liable only for his proportion of the rates in force during his tenancy.

FORLORN MOTHER.—A mother has no claim to a pension because a number of her sons are in the army.

DOUBTFUL.—The seven prismatic colours are red, yellow, blue, green, orange, indigo, and violet.

CHRIS.—For an immediate annuity of £40 a man of 60 years of age must pay £474 to the Post Office authorities.

UNHAPPY ETHEL.—The insanity of a husband, no matter for how long, does not legalise a second marriage during his lifetime.

ROVER.—A description of the reported "man and dog fight," at Haulay appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* of July, 1874.

JACK.—If the son lives at home and is not a lodger, his goods, found in the house, may be seized for the parent's debt.

R. L.—If the Court ordered payment at once execution can be enforced, although a portion of the debt has been accepted.

STRANGETH.—Treves is considered the oldest city in Germany, and is by far the richest of the cities in R. man remains.

ANXIOUS INQUIRY.—Nothing short of a legal divorce legalises a second marriage while the first husband or wife is alive.

ANTIQUITY.—A person at eighty, or any age, if mentally capable may make a will, and such will cancels any previously-made one.

MARIANNE.—Special marriage licenses may be obtained of the Archbishop of Canterbury through the registrar of the province.

DIANA.—The 2nd Battalion Grenadier Guards recently returned home, landed at Dover, and were transferred to the Tower of London.

ESQUIRE.—The charge for newspapers and letters is what they choose to make it at any special time; the rate charged to you is the one now enforced.

A SOLDIER'S LAMB.—The Crimean war was undertaken in defence of the independence of the Turkish Empire, which had been threatened by Russia.

BIRCHAM.—You must take out a license to carry a gun, whether you use it for shooting at a target or at birds, or whether you use it on Sunday or week days.

PHIL.—There is no such thing as you ask as keeping anything off a Royal Marine Artilleryman's pay, to be refunded at the expiry of his time.

HAIR.—The Boyne River in Ireland has been called the "Boyne of Science" on account, it is said, of the numerous monastic institutions along its shores.

LAUREL.—The *Great Eastern* was sold in the Clyde in December, 1887, for £16,500. She was moved to the Mersey in the following autumn and there broken up.

IGNORANT ONE.—The ordinary quarter-days are March 25, June 24, September 29, and December 25; but by agreement any landlord and tenant may fix any others for the payment of rent.

MATRICK.—Apply to the Secretary of the Admiralty; whether a navy pensioner receives 5d. per day extra at the age of 55 and 4d. at the age of 65 is a question which is now being discussed by all navy men.

SAPPHO.—The only volume of poems published by Lord Tennyson, subsequent to the "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After," &c (1880) is "Demeter, and other Poems" (1889).

AMBITIOUS.—We say at once that there is no field we can recommend to the grocer's assistant; he is not in "demand" anywhere, and must elbow himself into a place go where he likes.

MOTHER.—This child cannot be legally detained against the consent of his natural guardians, unless it is a certified industrial school to which he has been committed by the magistrates.

DISTRACTED PARENT.—Consent of a boy's parents is absolutely necessary, but we should think it will not be withheld if the danger of the boy's running off to sea, perhaps in a foreign ship, is put before them.

A BRITON.—The total of the regular effective army of Great Britain is roughly 212,000 men of all ranks. Including reserves and auxiliary forces, 619,000 home and colonial, or including regular forces in India, 691,000 of all ranks and arms.

LOTTIE.—Codfish are sometimes cured by being kept in a pile for two or three months after salting, in a dark room, covered with salt grass or the like, after which they are opened, and again piled in a compact mass for about the same period.

BRUCE.—Robert the Bruce was born either at Lochmaben or Turnberry, but his actual birthplace, like Homer's, is not accurately known. The movements of his parents at the time, however, confine the event to one or other of the places named.

LITTLE FEET.

Two little feet, so small that both may nestle
In one caressing hand;
Two tender feet upon the untrodden border
Of life's mysterious land.

Dimpled and soft and pink as peach tree blossoms
In April's fragrant days,
How can they walk among the briery tangles
Edging the world's rough ways?

These rosy feet, along the doubtful future
Must bear a mother's load;
Alas! since woman has the heavier burden,
And walks the harder road.

Love, for a while, will make the path before them
All dainty, smooth and fair;
Will out away the humber, letting only
The roses blossom there.

But when the mother's watchful eyes are shrouded
Away from the sight of men,
And these dear feet are left without her guiding,
Who shall direct them then?

How will they be allured, betrayed, deluded,
Poor little untaught feet?
Into what dreary mazes will they wander,
What dangers will they meet?

Will they go stumbling blindly in the darkness
Of sorrow's fearful shades?
Or find the upland slopes of peace and beauty,
Whose sunlight never fades?

Will they go tottering up Ambition's summit,
The common world above?
Or in some nameless vale securely shaded,
Walk aside by side with Love?

Some feet there be which walk life's track unwounded,
Which find but pleasant ways;
Some hearts there be to which this life is only
A round of happy days.

But these are few. Far more there are who wander
Without a hope or friend,
Who find their journey full of pains and losses,
And long to reach the end.

He shall be with her, the tender stranger,
Fair faced and tender eyed,
Before whose untamed feet the world's wide highway
Stretches so fair and wide!

Ah! who may read the future? For our darling
We crave all blessings sweet,
And pray that He who feeds the crying ravens
Will guide the baby's feet.

J. D.

BRITANNIA.—In infantry battles fighting hand to hand with swords is not practised, for the same reason that bows and arrows have been discarded—namely, because it is no longer effective. An army of infantry armed with sabres and cutlasses would stand a poor chance against one armed with muskets and bayonets.

PUEBLED ONE.—Your registered letter must have been received by the party to whom it was addressed, or it would have been sent back to you, as his signature was necessary before the postman would part with it. But write to the postmaster, mentioning that you sent the letter, giving him date and name, and asking him to be good enough to say if the person received it.

OLD KNOCK.—There is no authenticated case of spontaneous combustion in the human body; many have been reported, but on inquiry have been found to be cases in which the body was deliberately burned after death; a high medical authority says it may with certainty be predicted that so long as the circulation continues bodies will not take fire, even if they held a hand in the fire until it was charred.

T. B.—Britain has 25 first, 48 second, and 54 third—195 in all; France, 12, 16, and 85—113 in all; Italy, none first-class, 7 second, and 14 third—21. Britain has 10 coast defence iron-clads, France 15, Italy none. Britain has 29 gun vessels, France 19, Italy 21. Britain has 158 torpedo boats, France 179; only one-sixth first-class; Italy 150, one-half first-class. These are the relative strengths "up to date," giving each credit for the vessels that will be put into the water within a brief period, as well as for those actually afloat.

DISPUTANT.—Unquestionably, a receipt for an account paid by cheque must have a stamp. But as the receiver must write his name upon the cheque when cashing it he may say that is receipt enough.

E. A.—Attkin is a name from an object like hull, park, mair, or the like. It is essentially Scotch, and means little oak. The locality of its origin is doubtful, but the name is extensively prevalent in the West.

TOT.—The regular period on foreign service is eight years, but as a matter of fact a regiment may be away twice eight years for that matter. Time-expired men being regularly superseded by others sent out from the depot at home.

BASHFUL.—The amount of fees demandable would probably be shown in the vestry, but they are usually regulated by the supposed social standing of the bridegroom, especially with regard to clergymen specially invited to "assist" at the ceremony. Almost anything from a guinea upward would be accepted.

DOUGLAS.—Caledonia is still used as a practical designation for Scotland. The Caledonians were of Celtic origin, but the name disappeared about the beginning of the fourth century, and at a later period the Scots began to predominate over the Picts, and finally gave their name to the country.

WHITE FACE.—Open air exercises, bathing the face in tepid water, early rising and retiring, moderation in eating, and regular living generally, will help to secure the healthy complexion you desire. After an energetic game of some kind in the open air, take a tepid bath and rub dry with rather rough towels. Dry fannel is sometimes used to rub the face with and impart to it a rosy hue.

FISHER.—There is, we believe, no fish more active than the pike. It is described as darting through the water with the speed of an arrow. It is also, at certain seasons, one of the most voracious that is known, its remarkable activity producing great expenditure of strength, and creating a corresponding demand for food. Besides this, it is a fish of rapid growth and vigorous digestion.

LITTLE TIN SOLDIER.—Five companies of the 54th Regiment, with Colonels Durnford and Palfreys and other officers, were destroyed by a force of 30,000 Zulus at Isandlwana, near the river Tugela, on 22d January, 1879; Lord Chelmsford, who was in command of the British forces, left the 54th in an isolated position, but their fate was sealed by an unfortunate dispute for precedence between the colonels left in command, the result being that contradictory orders were issued when resistance to the attack became necessary; about 900 British troops were killed.

F. W.—To deodorise bottles that have contained benzol, benzene, thymol, naphthol and other similar strong-smelling substances, a simple and effectual plan is to pour into each a small portion of a mixture of sulphuric and nitric acids, and allow it to flow over all parts of the interior. After it has been left for about an hour in the bottles, which are occasionally taken up and turned about so that all parts of the internal surface are attacked by the acid, it will be found that a good rinsing with plain water will leave them as good as new.

FRANCISKA.—Your quotation from the "Inferno" is incomplete. The full sentence is thus rendered by Cary:—

"I began through wish
Of full assurance in that holy faith
Which vanquishes all error."

WORRIED BY CAT.—The owner of the cat is not liable in compensation for any damage his cat may do. It is a predatory animal, and he could not, though he tried, prevent it from poaching on his neighbour's ground. Of course he is not in a position to complain if the cat is hurt in being hunted out of the ground.

FOND MOTHER.—Your lad is like hundreds of others who do not know their own minds. He thinks going to sea as a purser would be a nice gentlemanly job, with a good deal of fun and not much hard work in it. He does not pause to reflect that every month of his time spent in his purser'ship is taken from the period that must be devoted to learning the trade or profession with which he is to maintain himself. He cannot grow old as a purser. Meantime, except he is a very efficient clerk and bookkeeper, with some little knowledge of store work he would be of no use in a big ship. We think you will err if you encourage the lad in his enthusiastic notions.

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